SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS UNIQUE MESSAGE

SWAMI GHANANANDA

With a Foreword by
DR. ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA (1836-1886)

SRI RAMAKRISHNA
AND
HIS UNIQUE MESSAGE

by

SWAMI GHANANANDA
(*Of the Ramakrishna Order of India*)

With a Foreword by

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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PUBLISHER

1 March 1987
Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday
Advaita Ashrama
Mayavati (Himalayas)

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FOREWORD

Sri Ramakrishna's message was unique in being expressed in action. The message itself was the perennial message of Hinduism. As Swami Ghanananda points out, Hinduism is unique among the historic higher religions in holding that neither Hinduism nor any other religion is a unique representation of the truth or a unique way of salvation. In the Hindu view, each of the higher religions is a true vision and a right way, and all of them alike are indispensable to mankind, because each gives a different glimpse of the same truth, and each leads by a different route to the same goal of human endeavours. Each, therefore, has a special spiritual value of its own which is not to be found in any of the others.

To know this is good, but it is not enough. Religion is not just a matter for study; it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness. He practised successively almost every form of Indian religion and philosophy, and he went on to practise Islam and Christianity as well. His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere. His devotion to God in the personal form of the Great Mother did not prevent him from attaining the state of 'contentless consciousness'—an absolute union with absolute spiritual Reality.

Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and the place at which he and his message were needed. This message could hardly have been delivered by anyone who had not been brought up in the Hindu religious tradition. Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal in 1836. He was born into a world that, in his lifetime, was, for the first time, being united on a literally world-wide scale. Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world's history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. But this Western skill has not only 'annihilated distance'; it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka's and the Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions: here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family—and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

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In the Atomic Age the whole human race has a utilitarian motive for following this Indian way. No utilitarian motive could be stronger or more respectable in itself. The survival of the human race is at stake. Yet even the strongest and most respectable utilitarian motive is only a secondary reason for taking Ramakrishna's and Gandhi's and Ashoka's teaching to heart and acting on it. The primary reason is that this teaching is right—and is right because it flows from a true vision of spiritual reality.

This book was first published in 1937, when the Second World War was looming up. The second edition was republished in 1946, after the atomic bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This third edition is as timely as its two predecessors.

ARNOLD TOYNBEE

30th August, 1969

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PREFACE

For one reason or another the MS. of this book could not be sent to the press earlier.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Arnold Toynbee for having read the book twice and written a Foreword which enhances its value.

Some changes in the book have been made to make it up to date.

My sincere thanks are due to the lay and monastic members of the staff of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of London who typed the MS., revised it, got it ready for the press, and read the proofs.

THE AUTHOR

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre
68 Dukes Avenue
London, N. 10
August, 1969

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The life of the spirit that Ramakrishna lived gives a silver lining to the cloud of clash and conflict in the world today. The words of wisdom that fell from his lips have leaped the mountains and crossed the seas. The world saw in him for the first time a peerless mystic who had such varied experiences as those of Sankara and Chaitanya, Buddha and Ramanuja, and whose realizations of the truths of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and other religions bore fruit in the most perfect synthesis of thought and life ever known to history. His heart was the confluence of spiritual currents flowing from all directions. In it met all spiritual truths as in the Divine Heart Itself to which they belong. His message of the Harmony of Religions forms his greatest contribution to spiritual thought. These passages are an attempt to elucidate this unique message in all its aspects, indicate its significance and its place in Indian religious literature, and suggest ways and means for its practical application. And in showing how he arrived at this priceless treasure, the book also briefly tells the story of his soul's journey through sea after sea of the shoreless and uncharted deep in search of all its pearls, which he later threaded into the most beautiful rosary.

The passages describing the Master's experiences in his own words or setting forth his teachings have been adapted from one book or another of the Ramakrishna Literature for ensuring exactness.

This little book has been written as a tribute to the memory of the Master on the occasion of his Birth Centenary. In the spiritual peace and joy, which I hope and pray it may bring to the reader, will lie its sole reward.

THE AUTHOR

Belur Math, Howrah, India
5th February, 1937

EDITORIAL NOTE

Diacritical marks have not been used in the text.

We have added a note on the pronunciation of transliterated words from Sanskrit and a list of transliterated words used in the book. Diacritical marks are intended to help the reader to pronounce the words correctly.

Such marks have been omitted from names of persons, places and institutions.

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are the revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in Ahimsa (non-injury). His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all. . . .

M. K. GANDHI

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CHAPTER I

SECULAR AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF THE WORLD CONFLICT

I. The modern world, physical nearness a feature. Conflict racial, national and political. II. Conflict of cultures and civilizations—Types of culture and their variations. III. Conflict of religions and sects—conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism in Europe, between Hinduism and Buddhism and between Hinduism and Jainism in India, between sects of Hinduism, between Hinduism and Islam, between the Christian and the non-Christian religions—Christianity in China—Christianity during the war and the part played by it in political, racial and cultural struggles. IV. Variety of religions and sects—Unwillingness and inability of followers of religions and sects to recognize the greatness of other faiths and creeds than their own—The enduring nature of religions and sects as proved by their past history.

I

When Columbus and Vasco da Gama gambled with luck and sailed by the stormy seas, little did men know that modern Europe was in the making. The age of navigation was to shift the centre of commerce and civilization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic; the countries bordering on the latter were to become the leading nations of the earth; and the forces awakened by the creative urge that had broken through medieval limitations and was expressing itself through the Renaissance were to reinvigorate Europe and confer on her the leadership of the world. Time was when the East had played her role and Greece and Rome had to struggle with oriental empires, and Europe had to contend with the Huns and the Arabs, the Mongols and the Ottoman Turks. But the course of history was reversed in the fifteenth century when Europe was being born anew, imbued with fresh life and vitality. In a few centuries she attained mastery over the East, nay, took the world by storm; the political expansion and consolidation that followed gave a definite turn to the social and economic life of nations. By the end of the nineteenth century, which saw the age of applied science and industrial enterprise on a stupendous scale, she had left her impress everywhere on the world: Canada and Australia—the daughters of England—as well as the United States are replicas of modern Europe; someone or other of the European powers owns, controls or influences large areas of Asia, Africa and South America.

Such world-wide conquest and widespread commerce have promoted intercourse between races and peoples. It is a fact of unique importance in the history of the world today that all its races and peoples have been brought together as they had never been before. The miracles of science and the marvels of organization have broken down the physical barriers that once separated towns and cities as well as countries and continents from one another. The railway and the steamship, the telegraph and the telephone, the wireless and the aeroplane, have annihilated distance and reduced the dimensions of the earth to those of a single vast city; an ever-increasing industry, an ever-expanding commerce and a system of international banking have almost converted the world into one large workshop.

The breakdown of the physical barriers that once separated the different parts of the globe has brought into clear relief the conflicting forces and elements in the world today. It has presented more vividly than ever before the lurid spectacle of the clash of the various branches of the human family—the Aryan and the Dravidian, the Mongol and the Semite—who have all been thrown together in the melting-pot of humanity, there to remain seething, bubbling, boiling, but never uniting. The dark and the fair, the brown and the yellow races of mankind formed, with the lapse of time, into nations living in different parts of the world, and when national differences arose among them and could not be settled, wars were waged. Originally these were fought to tickle the ambition of some king or emperor who wanted to see his kingdom or empire extended before his death, but in later times for political or economic reasons. So terrible have these wars been that the description by the Victorian poet[1] of 'Nature red in tooth and claw' might well be applied not only to the world of animals but also to the world of men. It is no wonder that Emerson characterized all history as the 'old chronology of selfishness and pride',[2] and observed, 'We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are as yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star'.[3]

Even colonization, the outcome of the so-called healthy spirit of expansion, is but a drawn-out battle, more subtle and therefore less perceptible. By force, and by the desire for trade and loot, the colonizers imposed their will upon the weak. Rightly did George Peele say, 'European history and homicide are indistinguishable.' As van Loon, the historian, aptly remarked, 'A human being with the mind of a sixteenth-century tradesman driving a 1921 Rolls-Royce is still a human being with the mind of a sixteenth-century tradesman.'[1]

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[1] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*.

[2] Emerson's *Essays*: 'On History'.

[3] Ibid., 'On Politics'.

II

Besides these conflicts, there is antagonism between cultures and civilizations as well. It has been brought about by a lack of sympathetic understanding of their differences caused by ages of distinctive growth and development, and by variations in outlook and philosophy of life. It is therefore inevitable, like national conflicts. Even what is known as 'the colour problem'—the struggle between the white and the coloured races of mankind—is resolved partly to the conflict of cultures. The collective mind of a people moving along distinctive lines of thought and traditions marked off by its characteristic culture and civilization revolts against the idea of association and comradeship with men of alien cultures and civilizations. This explains General Smuts' remark to Mahatma Gandhi in some such words as these: 'We are not afraid of your people, but we are afraid of their culture.'[1] When one nation conquers another, it attempts to justify its subjugation of the vanquished by claiming cultural superiority. That is why we hear of 'the White Man's burden' of civilizing the non-white races of the earth. Such a burden means not only the heartless exploitation of the natural resources of the conquered countries, but also the duty of raising them to the level of the rulers in culture and civilization—in mental, moral and spiritual attainments.

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[1] Hendrik Willem van Loon, *The Story of Mankind*.
[2] M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*.

It may be asked, 'Why do cultures and civilizations clash?" The answer is simple: man is neither able nor willing to recognize that other cultures and civilizations have a value, and are as good and necessary for others as his own is for himself.

Cultures and civilizations are the expressions of the collective mind of peoples in differing moods and depths. Every nation, every race, has raised its own magnificent structures of thought, adorned by the bright and beautiful blossoms of the various arts. There have been men in all climes and in all ages who have, with sharpened intellects, cloven through nature, probed her secrets, and discovered the exact and the experimental sciences; they have conquered the domain of psychology and metaphysics; they have dived deep into the innermost recesses of the soul and given out systems of religion and philosophy; they have enriched civilization by their treatises on law and polity; they have expressed the joy of life not only in the melody of music, but also in the rhythm of colour; they have wrought poetry not only in prose and verse, but also in silver and gold, in marble and tapestry, in the language of the soul crying for God and in its rhapsodies.

Man is apt to forget that cultures have developed through centuries, and they present a rich variety of

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types. The Hellenic and Hebraic types, for example, differ in their background, outlook and ideals. The one looks for the joys and pleasures of life; the other shuns them for the sake of the joys and pleasures of the soul. Every system of religion has built round itself consciously or unconsciously a system of culture and civilization which appears like its halo. Cultures have drawn their inspiration from a central religious impulse, and have been moulded by one single spiritual idea. In this manner have arisen and grown the Hindu and Buddhist, Christian and Islamic types of cultures. They all have a general religious setting and show a spiritual trend, moving towards a definite goal. The thought-currents in these types have emanated from their respective religions. With the weakening of the central religious impulse, a culture may be invaded by extraneous elements, which in the course of time may tend to change and even definitely alter the type itself. In Europe the Christian culture, which grew and developed under the inspiration of the personality of Jesus and the influence of the Church, held sway for centuries; but it became impaired by Hellenic thought, which began slowly to penetrate, and eventually to dominate, European life. Though ancient Greece is now no more, she speaks through the voice, and lives through the arts and literature, culture and civilization of modern Europe.

When, however, the original culture of a nation has struck its roots sufficiently deep into the soil, no new culture or civilization alien in character or contrary in trend can seriously affect it. The history of India in the nineteenth century furnishes an instance in point.

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The condition of the country at the time was different from that of Europe during the period of the Renaissance. India was passing through a period of cultural and intellectual decline during the British conquest. Her people were dazzled for a time by the glamour of Western culture and civilization. The soul of the indigenous culture with its traditions, outlook and ideals was threatened with extinction. But the alien culture could not get a permanent hold on the country, nor destroy the ancient culture; for in the reaction that followed the advent of the alien type, a great cultural and religious revival came, restoring the original vitality of the national culture.

The forms and the setting through which a system of culture expresses itself vary. Such variation is seen more in the arts and poetry, which are its typical products. Taking music for example, we find that Indian music and music of the West differ so much that the songs of one school have no charm for the admirers of the other, but both are expressions of the cultural soul of their respective nations. If the genius of a language is something which inheres in it and does not lend itself to translation, the genius of a culture is still more inexpressible. Variety is the law of nature and the diversity of the several types of cultures and civilizations is as inexplicable as the diversity of natural life, of its fauna and flora. But behind all this natural diversity a grand unity and community of purpose is discernible. All great civilizations contribute to the pleasures and amenities of life, and all great cultures conduce to its refinement. The one improves the objective world and makes nature subservient to man, who derives both

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profit and pleasure from a mastery of her secrets; the other chastens the mind and purifies the soul. They both reflect the yearnings and aspirations of men, their struggles and success in the march of life.

Culture is like food which we consume not merely for its nutritive value, but also for its agreeability. A system of culture suits the race that has evolved it more than any other; and the forms of its expressions, like poetry, music, and the other arts, appeal less to other races, if at all. It prepares the environment in which the minds of the men belonging to it are able to grow and blossom with ease and vigour. When a person belonging to one type of culture by birth and tradition lives in the environment of another, he shares the fate of the tree that is transplanted from an alien soil and an alien climate. That is why a foreign system of education and culture like the English system is unsuited to a country like India, possessing its own culture and education from time immemorial. Genius flowers best on the soil of its own culture. Education and culture are an expression of the soul of a nation, its *samskaras* (latent impressions) and *vasanas* (tendencies), of what Sir John Woodroffe calls 'the Seed of the Race'.[1]

The cultures which have survived are the outcome of centuries of growth and development, and possess a remarkable power of endurance. Some ancient cultures died after existing several centuries, like those brooklets that become lost in the soil. Others became absorbed by more powerful cultures that had great assimilative capacity, like streams that add to the volume and contents of some mighty river rolling down in their vicinity,

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[1] Sir John Woodroffe, *Seed of the Race or Essay on Indian Education.*

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of which they become the tributaries. The cultures of today are those which have lived on for ages in the past without losing themselves in the onrush of invading hordes or failing to grow by adaptability or assimilation. It is but natural that they exhibit distinctive characteristics of their own, and so long as these are retained, they are bound to survive in the future as well. Interaction between them there is sure to be, especially in the modern era which precludes the possibility of isolation; they may exercise the power to absorb each other, but cultures and civilizations that have had the inner strength to stand the wear and tear of time cannot be attended with the evil of studied neglect, and much less with the danger of wanton destruction.

III

The clash in secular thought and life has its counterpart in the religious. The wars of creeds and the factions of faiths complete the picture of world warfare.

If religion has brought peace and blessing on mankind, it has also caused cruelty and persecution. If it has created and sustained large congregations and vast brotherhoods, it has also engendered antagonism and animosity. Nothing else has been the instrument of so much good and charity as religion: nothing else has deluged the world so much in bloodshed as religion. Nothing has given so much sweetness and light as religion: nothing else has been such a curse and tyranny as religion.

The conflict that we find in religious life today is not simply between religions; it permeates all the sects of the same religion, that follow the teachings of the same Saviour, Prophet or Teacher.

European history contains instances of bitter controversies and heartless persecutions caused by sectarian hatred between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. The working of the Inquisition with its dungeons and torture chambers, the burning alive or hanging of innocent victims of sectarianism for the only sin of maintaining honest beliefs and sincere convictions, the wanton sacrifice of intellectual geniuses at the altar of fierce fanaticism, the heart-rending tragedy of the night of St. Bartholomew in the year 1572, during which the French Protestant leaders were mercilessly killed, the decapitation of the Protestant subjects of King Philip in the Netherlands, the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), which was the natural outcome of a century of ever-increasing hatred—all these are blots on European history.

Though India has the highest record for tolerance and goodwill, which have enabled alien religions and heterodox offshoots of Hinduism to live side by side with the ancient religion of the Aryan *rishis*, even her history has not been altogether free from the taint of persecution caused by religious hatred and sectarian animosity. During the days of the decline of Buddhism and Jainism, there were clashes between the followers of Shaivism preached by Saint Sambandhar and other Tamil saints of the South on the one hand, and the followers of both Buddhism and Jainism, into whose folds had crept by that time corrupt practices and other evils, on the other. When Shaivism and Vaishnavism were gaining power during the days of Hindu religious

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revival, there were instances of the outburst of sectarian feeling between these two rival denominations of Hinduism. Now one sect prospered, now the other; now one suffered at the hands of the other, now it triumphed over the other. When the Shaivites were persecuting the Vaishnavites, Sri Ramanujacharya, the great Sri Vaishnava teacher, had to hide himself in the hill-temple of Melkote in Mysore for twelve years, until the fury of the enemies had subsided.

History, both ancient and modern, furnishes us with examples of the conflict between the Semitic and the Aryan faiths. The sufferings of the Hindus caused by the cruel fanaticism of foreign invaders professing alien religions began with the Arab invasion of Sind, and continued with severity, though interruptedly, till the last days of the Moghul Empire. It was no wonder that the policy of religious intolerance and persecution, pursued by Aurangazeb, was one of the prime causes of the downfall of the empire.[1]

The conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims in undivided India before independence, is well known. It formed one of the great obstacles to the attainment of self-government by Indians. Riots and feuds arose now and then, particularly in the towns, and the feeling of animosity spread. 'Sudden outbursts of hooliganism at intervals, secret murder and the sense of insecurity of life and property, remind us of the troublous days of Karim and Chittoo, Tantia Topi and Akbar Khan. . . . Our surprise is, how can the dark days of the Pindari reign of terror be brought about in the noontide of

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[1] Sen and Ray Choudhury, *Groundwork of Indian History.*

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British power in India?'[1] It is also well known that communal disharmony led to the division of the country into India and Pakistan when independence was granted, and resulted in the greatest mass migration known in history, affecting the lives and property of not less than ten million people who came into India.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century when British power gained ascendancy, the religion of the foreign missionaries was at the height of its glory and power. There was a time when the British authorities did not allow the Christian ministers to settle in India and spread their religion. But as they became strong, they permitted the missionaries freely and openly to preach the Gospel to the non-Christians of the land. 'Our best safeguard', wrote Mr. William Edwards who became a judge of the Agra High Court, 'is in the evangelization of the country.'[2] Macaulay was selected to preside over the deliberations of the Anglicists and the Orientalists, because he shared Bentinck's views in regard to the Anglicization and evangelization of India. 'No Hindu', wrote Macaulay, 'who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion.'[3]

Christianity could not, however, spread in India like Islam, and the success attained by the missionaries has been mostly confined to the masses belonging to the low classes—the poor, the oppressed and the ostracized.

China, a quarter of a century before the Marxist

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[1] *Modern Review*, June 1926: article on 'The Problem of Hindu-Moslem Unity' by Moulvi Wahed Hossain.

[2] *Modern Review*, November 1925: article on 'Christianization of India' by Major B. D. Basu.

[3] Macaulay, *Letter to his Father*, 1836.

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revolution, began a vigorous campaign against Christianity and missionary education. It is remarkable that at a conference which was held in October 1924, which included the most responsible educators in China, one of the resolutions demanded that 'the Chinese Government shall henceforth control all educational work in China, that foreign schools shall be required to register with the Government, to follow in their curriculum and administration the national and provincial regulations, to employ teachers having Government certificates, and'—here comes the most controversial point—'to observe the following prohibition, "foreigners shall not use their schools or other educational agencies for the propagation of religion".'[1] Later, all religions, including Christianity, were brought under the direct control of the People's Government. Today religion has become a byword for contempt.

It is a thousand pities that in the great struggle between powers and peoples, between cultures and civilizations, even religion, the voice of God, the giver of peace and blessings to mankind, takes sides and fans the fire of discontent. Even the clergy 'who as representatives of their Church should be a power above the nations have, with some exceptions in all countries, become violently nationalist partisans'.[2] During the First World War most of the churches keyed their music to the war pitch and glorified the art of killing enemies by covering it with the sanctity of religion.[3] After preaching to the employees of a submarine boat company at

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[1] *The Living Age*, 1925.

[2] A. W. Remington.

[3] *The Watchman*, 1926.

Fort Newark and consigning his enemies to hell, an American clergyman is reported to have said: 'When I stand before the judgment seat of the Almighty, I want to be able to look my God in the face and tell Him that I gave the Germans at least one good wallop before I shuffled off.'[1] A well-known popular song which was sung in America during the Second World War was, 'Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition.' Putnam Weale in his book *The Conflict of Colour* has pointed out that Christianity was a great factor in the evolution of the white races, not because, according to his view, Christianity as a religious system had a special value, but because it supplied just that inspiration and organization which were needed by crude and unimaginative peoples to give them discipline and to intensify the conflict with Asia and Europe. The writer adds, 'The political mark which the Christian Church has consequently made in Europe can never be wholly effaced, though it is a mark entirely different from anything which would be anticipated from a reading of the Gospels.' 'Anti-clericalism is not an article of export'—so remarked a French minister; for religion attacked at home was found to serve French colonial aims and the maintenance of French interests abroad. 'In other countries too,' writes Sir John Woodroffe, 'the Cross has been made synonymous with the flag and the flag with trade, "whether", to use President Wilson's words, "the persons to whom it was taken welcomed it or not." As days pass by and the potential strength of the vast hordes of the non-Christian countries is more and more recognized, Christianization is proposed as a remedy for

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[1] Sir John Woodroffe, *Is India Civilized?*

diminishing racial and political danger.'[1] The author of *The Conflict of Colour* quoted above hopes that such a Christianization will help to wean the negro from the militant bent of mind which he assumes under Islam. He shocks his readers when he frankly confesses that 'the part which the white man is called upon to play in Africa is the part of Delilah and no other,' for if the black man is Christianized, 'his destructive strength is stripped from him as was Samson's when his locks were cut'. He also points out that 'there are those who still believe that, as it will be in our day impossible to bar out the hordes of Asia and Africa, the only safeguard for Europe and the white man still lies today, as in the past, in Christianity; and that the impossibility of allying themselves with other creeds is perhaps the reason why instinctively the great movement towards Christianizing the coloured world is growing stronger and stronger in Anglo-Saxon countries as a sort of forlorn hope launched to capture an almost impregnable position.' Jesus was a great Teacher and his mission was to restore the Kingdom of God to man, to drive out the unclean spirits of violence and selfishness, hatred of enemies and neighbours; but such a mission becomes political in the hands of those who know not what it is.

IV

Man rightly expects religions to be the healing balm in individual and collective life—the harbingers of peace and harmony. They are the greatest gifts that we have inherited from the past; they are bound up with hoary cultures and ancient civilizations; they have inspired them and illumined them, nay, in many cases they have been their originators. The age of the priests and the prelates in many countries has almost invariably preceded the age of the kings and generals, of merchant princes and industrial magnates. Religions have paved the way for cultural empires like Greater India, or Farther India as it has been fittingly called, which have swept off the boundaries set up by geographical limitations or political laws. They have provided food for the needy and raiment for the poor, and built hospitals not only for men, but also for humbler creatures. They have lit the torch of secular and spiritual learning, and kept it alive through centuries. Why, then, do religions clash?

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[1] Sir John Woodroff, *Is India Civilized?*

The answer is simple: man is unwilling and unable to recognize that any religion other than his own equally shows the path to God, and that it is as good and necessary for someone else as his own religion is for himself. When the follower of a religion or denomination comes across differences between his creed and those of others, he does not attribute them to the inevitable law of diversity, but to superstition and sin. Some thinkers have recognized that cultures and civilizations of different countries and climes, though bound to differ, may yet have certain basic principles in common: but comparatively few have appreciated the truth that variations are bound to exist also among religious systems, which are but different ways of religious thinking and spiritual living.

That the teachings of the great Prophets of the world and the religious systems associated with them have

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lived on for centuries in the past, in spite of persecution and oppression during times of religious warfare, is proof positive of their inner strength and power of endurance. Each system, each sect, has grown and developed by assimilating new ideas and principles, and adopting new ways of worship and adoration from other religions, but without losing its central features which have kept up its individual note in the music of the world's religions. Is it not therefore the height of fanatical frenzy on the part of the followers of any one religion or sect to think that the whole world will one day be converted to their faith or denomination, and the earth will in time to come be peopled only by its devoted adherents?

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CHAPTER II

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

I. Value of comparative study of religion—Main points of similarity: Common subject matter—Moral and ethical disciplines—Existence of soul—Divine grace or spiritual perfection, means and methods of attaining—Will, head and heart, culture of—Mythology, rituals, philosophy and higher spiritual disciplines—Revelation and superconsciousness—Cultures and civilizations under the inspiration of religions—Relation of soul to God—Sense of unity and brotherhood in religion—The negative part in every religion—Element of broadmindedness and catholicity in all religions. II. Conclusions of comparative religion—Greatness of Sri Ramakrishna.

I

Striking indeed are the results of the study of comparative religion and philosophy. When done in an impartial and constructive spirit, and not with a view to glorifying any religion at the expense of other faiths, such a study reveals how great religious systems have grown in the past and what their elements are. It discloses the points of agreement and difference between religions, and also enables us to explain them. It truly lays the foundation for a better understanding between the various creeds of the world.

What exactly are the points of similarity between the religions of the world?

I

When we analyse the elements of any religion, we find that it usually begins with the well-known question of the origin of the universe. We see the sublime and beautiful nature around us—the earth below and the sun and the moon and the stars above. What is the story of this wonderful creation? Every religion answers this question in its cosmological part. This question naturally leads to the second, namely, What is the First Principle? What existed before the universe came into existence? What is Its nature? The answer to this is given in the portion of religion relating to the nature of God. Thirdly, the question is asked about man himself who forms the microcosm—a part and parcel of this universe. What is man? What is the relation between man and the universe around, as well as between man and his Maker? Fourthly comes the question which concerns everyone, namely, what happens to man after death? What, indeed, is the difference between one who does not want religion or believe in it, and another who professes and practises it? This question is answered in the eschatological part of every religion. We thus find that the First Principle or the nature of God, cosmology or the science of creation, the soul of man or his real nature, and eschatology or the science of life after death, form the subject matter of every religion. Every religion, therefore, deals with one and the same subject matter.

2

Every religion also recognizes that it should make its followers better and nobler; or in other words, its value consists not in its doctrines and dogmas, its theories about God, soul and salvation, but in its power to refine and mould character. Every Teacher has laid down rules of conduct for the guidance of his followers, and these have been elaborated in the system of religion that has grown under the inspiration of his personality. The moral and ethical code of all religions contains such universal moral sentiments and ethical precepts as truthfulness, purity, temperance, justice, kindness to men and animals, patience, love, charity, etc. It teaches men to strive after moral excellence. It inculcates the Golden Rule to 'do unto others as we would have others do unto us'.

It may be asked why all religions emphasize the need for the practice of moral and ethical disciplines. These are intended to purify the mind in order that it may reflect the purity and peace within. Moral and ethical training has to go hand in hand with spiritual practices if religious life is to succeed. Man must be pure both externally and internally to attain spiritual progress. External purity can be attained by cleansing and other processes, but internal purity, which is far more essential than the external, can be attained only by the observance of right rules of conduct and morality. These rules in the form of the 'Do's' and 'Don't do's' of its moral and ethical code are enjoined by every religion.

3

If moral and ethical preparation is necessary for success in spiritual life, what is meant by spiritual life itself? Spiritual life is life of the spirit. It is a common feature of all religions that they proclaim the existence of a soul beyond body and mind. They tell us that in man there is an undying part called the soul or spirit which does not die with the death of the body, but is imperishable and immortal. They tell us in different words that the soul itself is pure and perfect, but man has made himself impure and imperfect by his own actions in disobedience to spiritual laws, which some religions call God's commandments. The average man does not understand this fact, though he may believe in it; it is due to the limitations of body and mind, which cloud the soul from his vision. Man can realize his spiritual nature by transcending these limitations.

In dealing with the nature of the soul, some religious systems like that of the Hindus have also treated the nature of the mind as well as the nature of knowledge. This has resulted in the growth and development of the sciences of psychology and epistemology under such religious systems.

It is worthy of note that Buddhism does not give any permanent value to the soul, so that the question of realizing it does not arise in that religion. On the other hand, it preaches that man should realize the impermanence of the soul to attain the goal of life.

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4

Though religions tell us that man has lost the original purity and perfection of his soul by violating moral and spiritual laws, which are often called God's commandments, they show him the path by which he can regain his spiritual nature, and become pure and perfect again. The means and methods of attaining grace or spiritual perfection are given by every religion. Now to please God, we must worship Him and live a life in obedience to His commandments. Such worship is done in a variety of ways, with or without the help of external aids such as symbols or images. Religions like Protestantism and Islam emphatically prohibit the worship of God through such aids, as such extraneous help was evidently abused by men who took them to be God Himself; hence the strong hatred of these religions for what they call idolatry. But let it not be forgotten that images and symbols are but reminders of the abstract; it is the ideal that is worshipped through the idol, and not the idol itself.

Religions recommend also the worship of Incarnations and Prophets, and saints and holy men. They enjoin on their followers pilgrimages to holy places and the observance of similar means for their benefit. So universal are these that we find them enjoined by every religion.

It is also remarkable that all religions have discovered the glory and potency of sacred names or mystic formulae (*mantras*). Their repetition is considered a valuable practice by all the religions in the world.

5

Religions provide man with the means and methods of purifying and exercising his will, intellect and heart during the course of his spiritual evolution. By laying greater or less emphasis on one or more of these faculties according to his temperamental tastes and inclinations they enable him to develop them. This results in more intense expression of his personality through the growth and development of his faculties; and, as education itself means the 'drawing out' of these faculties and the unfoldment of the inner self, religious culture may be said to be the fulfilment of all education. True education in the real sense of the word is incomplete without spiritual culture.

Though scope has been given in every religion for the exercise of the faculties of the mind and their purification, the extent of the scope differs from one religion to another. If the emphasis is made more on will, the religion becomes more active in type (the path of Action or *karma yoga*), and suits followers of an active temperament; if on intellect, it becomes predominantly a path of discrimination (the path of Knowledge or *jnana yoga*), with a highly developed system of philosophy and metaphysics, and suits those adherents who are marked by distinctively intellectual tendencies; if on emotion, it bears a strong emotional impress (the path of Love or *bhakti yoga*), and suits those votaries richly endowed with feeling.

Every religion also consists of four parts, namely, mythology and rituals, philosophy and higher spiritual

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disciplines. Of these the first two may be said to have been intended for the masses, just as the last two are for enlightened and cultured minds. This does not mean that mythology and rituals are valueless for the learned; they contain nuggets of gold which require but a little polishing to bring out their lustre. They have a philosophical background and breathe a religious atmosphere; they have successfully democratized those truths of religion and philosophy which would otherwise have remained inaccessible to the masses. They may be called the kindergarden of religion, and it is not all that can afford to forego the benefit that can be derived from them in a larger or smaller measure. Study of mythology forms a preparation for the performance of rituals and ceremonials. If mythology is for the unsophisticated, philosophy is for the more advanced. Rituals and ceremonials form the practical part of mythology, whereas meditation and other higher spiritual exercises are intended for the realization of truths preached by philosophy. Mere study of the theoretical part of a religion, whether it be popular mythology or intricate philosophy, can never take us to the goal; unless we undergo a practical course with great steadfastness and devotion, we cannot realize God.

6

It may be asked, 'What does the practice of religion lead us to?' The answer to this is furnished by all religions. They all tell us that as a result of worship, prayer and other forms of spiritual disciplines, man reaches a plane beyond this world, beyond his mind or intellect, and comes face to face, as it were, with certain facts or truths, which he could never have grasped with the senses, nor perceived with the mind or the intellect; in other words, he attains the superconscious state. What has been called revelation or inspiration, or God teaching man or speaking to him as to a beloved son, is possible only when man elevates himself to that exalted plane. The state of superconsciousness is called *samadhi* by the Hindu, *nirvana* by the Buddhist, 'peace that passeth all understanding' by the Bible, and is known by other terms in other Scriptures.

7

Superconscious realization being the goal of all religious practices, it is obvious that the Prophet or Teacher of every Scripture had attained it in an abundance and to a degree undreamt of by ordinary mortals. This, then, is yet another point of similarity between religions, namely, that superconscious realization of a high order, of a profound and extraordinary character, is the criterion of a Prophet or Teacher, a seer or a free soul, and such realization forms the central core of every religion. When great Teachers or Prophets or a group of seers or perfected men attained the superconscious state, they had high spiritual truths revealed to them. These were taught by them and preserved by their followers, being transmitted by word of mouth or set down in writing. Thus came the Scriptures of every religion, which are reverently studied by its adherents and form its great authority.

It is, however, only natural that the followers of a

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religion do not understand the truths of the Scriptures as clearly as the immediate disciples of the Prophet or Teacher who originally taught them. Hence in every religion theologians and philosophers arose who commented upon the Scriptures. A system of philosophy that has grown round the Scriptures of religion is unlike the speculative and discursive philosophy of the West today: it is highly intuitive and practical, and it prepares the ground for the practice of that religion.

All religions, with their systems of theology and philosophy, consider the realization of God the *summum bonum* of life and the culmination of man's endeavours. Every religion, therefore, preaches that man's life should be so ordered and lived that he may ultimately reach the divine goal. This has contributed to the growth and development of cultures and civilizations which have been influenced or moulded by the spirit of religious teachings to a greater or lesser extent. Poetry, painting, music, sculpture and architecture—all these have been employed by religions as handmaids to serve a spiritual end.

8

We have seen that the attainment of superconsciousness which comes with the realization of the Personal God or the Impersonal Absolute is the culmination of all spiritual practices; indeed, it is the greatest theme of every religion. Now, what is the state of the soul during realization? All systems proclaim that, in the state of superconsciousness, the soul experiences either its affinity with the Personal God or its unity with the

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Impersonal Absolute. In monistic systems like the Advaita Vedanta and Sufism, the unity of the soul with the Godhead is boldly proclaimed. In the non-monistic religions, the soul is considered a part of God, or as existing in some sort of relationship with the Creator, like servant and Master, son and Father and so on.

9

The conception of the relation of the soul of man to his Maker has, in the case of all religions, spiritualized the conception of the relation of man to man. God being impartial, all men are equal in His eyes, despite the inequalities of life for which they alone are responsible. Every religious system, therefore, has exercised and is still exercising a potent influence on the social and collective life of its followers. They are not chance companions in the journey of life, but spiritual brothers and sisters marching on a religious pilgrimage and bound for a divine destination. All religions preach the unity of life and solidarity of mankind, and when this doctrine is translated into practice, it results in the formation of large communities and great brotherhoods. Usually man's sense of unity and brotherhood is confined to the fold of the religion or sect to which he belongs.

10

Why is the sense of brotherhood limited to one's own religion or sect? A consideration of this question leads us to yet another feature common to all religions, which is, that every religion preaches a definite path

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of its own. Every great Prophet or Incarnation has emphatically proclaimed, just as Jesus Christ did, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' Such teachings may be considered the positive part of a religion. But most religions also have a negative part which speaks of hell-fire and damnation, eternal or otherwise, for the stragglers. This is intended to prevent its followers from straying into other folds.

II

Last but not least is the most interesting, and to the students of comparative religion and philosophy the most instructive, feature common to all religions. It is a matter for agreeable surprise that comparative religion and philosophy prove beyond doubt that every religion possesses an unmistakable element of catholicity and broad-mindedness to a greater or lesser degree —a generous and hospitable attitude towards other religions.

Beginning with the Hindu Scriptures we read, 'Truth is One; sages call It by various names.'[1] Says Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, 'Whosoever comes to Me through whatsoever form, I fulfil his desires. O Partha! All men are struggling along paths which in the end lead to Me.'[2] Not only the Scriptures of the Hindus but even their folk-songs express the same sentiment of catholicity and harmony. Here is a South Indian folk-song:

> Into the bosom of the one great sea
> Flow streams that come from hills on every side,

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[1] *Rig-Veda*, I. clxiv. 46.

[2] *Bhagavad-Gita*, iv. 11; vii. 21.

Their names are various as the springs,
And thus in every land do men bow down
To the great God, though known by many names.[1]

A passage from the Buddhist Scriptures reads: 'The root of religion is to reverence one's own faith and never to revile the faith of others. My doctrine makes no distinction between high and low, rich and poor. It is like the sky, it has room for all; and like water it washes all alike.'[2] Buddha condemned the tendency prevalent among the religious disputants of his day to make a display of their own doctrines and damn those of others. He also held in high respect the *brahmins* who led the truly moral life. He asked his followers to avoid all discussions which were likely to stir up discontent among the different sects.

One of Ashoka's rock-edicts, the theme of which is religious toleration, says, 'The king, beloved of the gods, honours every form of religious faith, but considers no gift or honour so much as the increase of the substance of religion; whereof, this is the root, to reverence one's own faith and never to revile that of others. Whoever acts differently injures his own religion while he wrongs another's.'[3] 'The texts of all forms of religion shall be followed under my protection.'[4] Commenting on these noble sentiments, Dr. Radhakrishnan rightly says: 'The Hindu and the Buddhist rulers of India acted up to this principle with the result that the persecuted and the refugees of all great religions found shelter in

[1] Gover, *South Indian Folk-songs.*
[2] *Sutta Nipata.*
[3] The Twelfth Rock-edict.
[4] Ibid.

India. The Jews, the Christians, the Parsees were all allowed absolute freedom to develop on their own lines. Yuan Chwang reports that at the great festival of Prayaga, King Harsha dedicated on the first day a statue to the Buddha; another to the Sun, the favourite deity of his father, on the second; and to Shiva on the third. The famous Kottayam plates of Sthanuravi (9th century A.D.) and the Cochin plates of Vijayarajadeva bear eloquent testimony to the fact that the Hindu kings not only tolerated Christianity but granted special concessions to the professors of that faith. Only the other day the Hindu prince of Mysore made a gift for the rebuilding of the Christian Church in his state.'[1]

Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, says: 'He alone is a true Hindu whose heart is just, and he only is a good Mohammedan whose life is pure. Be true and thou shalt be free. . . . God will not ask man of what race he is; He will ask what he has done.' 'Love the saints of every faith. Put away your pride. Remember the essence of religion is meekness and sympathy.' 'To him the delusion of whose heart is gone, Hindus and Mussalmans are the same.'

The Zoroastrian religion expresses a noble sentiment in the words : 'Have the religions of mankind no common ground? Is there not everywhere the same enrapturing beauty? Broad indeed is the carpet which God has spread, and many are the colours which He has given it. Whatever road I take joins the highway that leads to the Divine.'

Judaism also teaches the same broad-mindedness. It says: 'Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God

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[1] Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life.*

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created us?'[1] 'Thou shalt not vex a stranger nor oppress him, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.'[2] Even the Egyptians, by whom the Israelites had been so mercilessly treated, were to be requited with charitable forbearance: 'Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian because thou wast a stranger in his land.'[3] The law knew no difference between Jew and Gentile.

In the Christian Scriptures it is written: 'God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that revereth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him.' 'He hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth.'

About the diversity of religions, the Koran says: 'To everyone we have given a law and a way. And if God had pleased, He would have made you all one people [professing one religion]. But He hath done otherwise that He might try you in that which He has severally given unto you; wherefore press forward in good works. Unto God shall ye return and He will tell you that concerning which you disagree.' Says the Prophet of Islam, 'There is no compulsion in religion; the right way is in itself distinguished from the wrong.'[4] 'Say thou, O ye who disbelieve, I do not worship what ye worship, nor do ye worship what I worship, neither will I worship what ye worship, neither will ye worship what I worship—ye have your religion and I have my religion.'[5] 'Abuse not those whom they call on beside God, for then they may abuse God openly in their ignorance.'[6]

In fact the many points of similarity between the teachings of the world's different Prophets and Teachers make one inclined to think that if they were all to meet today, they would embrace one another in mutual love and respect, and pass into a state of God-consciousness in their ecstatic joy. They would certainly be shocked at the religious feuds and dissensions between their numerous followers. So striking are the points of agreement between the various religions as to suggest that in many particulars they have copied from one another. They all owe their origin to the superconscious realizations of the several Prophets and Teachers, and their teachings help one to reach the spiritual plane. The languages of nations, like their customs and manners, are many; but the language of the soul which finds expression through them is one. The difference between the religions of the world is merely one of expression, not of substance.

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[1] Mal. ii. 10.

[2] Exod. xii. 21.

[3] Deut. xxiii. 7.

[4] Koran, ii. 258.

[5] Ibid., cix. 1–6.

[6] Ibid., vi. 108.

Different religions are but different readings of the one Reality and teach different ways of realizing It. Swami Vivekananda, the most powerful and most eloquent preacher of the Vedanta in modern times, truly observed: 'We are all looking at Truth from different standpoints which vary according to our birth, education, surroundings and so on. We are viewing Truth, getting as much of It as these circumstances will permit, colouring the Truth with our own heart, with our own mind. . . . This makes the difference between man and man and occasions, sometimes, even contradictory ideas; yet we all belong to the same Universal Truth.' God is One and Eternal, and Religion, therefore, is also One and Eternal. That One and Eternal Religion has been existing from time immemorial and will continue to exist for ever. Religions of the world are each an expression of the one Eternal Religion, a picture of the Truth from a particular angle of vision. They are not essentially contradictory or antagonistic. Various races, various peoples, various minds have from times prehistoric photographed the Divine Reality from various angles and circulated the results among mankind. Even if we had more religions than what we have today, more Prophets, more Teachers, more Incarnations, there need be no anxiety on the score of their multiplicity, for each religion is an addition to the paths leading to God, and each Prophet or Teacher is a new source of strength and power.

The results of the comparative study of religions point, therefore, to a momentous conclusion, namely, that all religions are but varied paths to that goal of spiritual life, called God or Freedom, Peace or Perfection, though the conceptions of the goal as well as the means and methods of reaching it differ. If this conclusion is acceptable to the followers of the religions of today, or at any rate to the thinking minds, it is bound to exercise a salutary influence on the relation between the many paths and pave the way for the harmony of religions.

We should not, however, forget that such a conclusion is the outcome of a purely intellectual enquiry and can receive at best only an intellectual assent. It requires confirmation by the spiritual testimony resulting from the practice of various religions, for such religious testimony alone can give validity to a conviction, however reasonable or however logical. Without the support of experience, no conviction will be acceptable to the world at large. But in view of the difficulty of successfully practising one's own religion and of realizing God and attaining perfection, one might rightly consider the practice of several religions to be entirely out of the question. But in India, which has for ages been the home of many religions, the hour had come in the last century and the man was ready. Just as a scientist conducts a series of the greatest and most difficult experiments one after another for years and, after arriving at their results, co-relates them and enunciates a law, so also Sri Ramakrishna trod the different paths of religions, not nibbling, but diving into the depths of his soul according to the precepts of those various religions, attained the goal through each of them, and by discovering their inner harmony, built up the most magnificent spiritual synthesis ever known to history.

CHAPTER III

AT THE FEET OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

I. India at the time of Sri Ramakrishna—Religious revival and national awakening in India. II. Sri Ramakrishna: His early life. III. Purificatory processes which he underwent. IV. The worship of Kali the Mother and its philosophy. V. Sri Ramakrishna's intense spiritual yearning, first vision of God as Mother, and subsequent experiences. IV. His God-intoxicated state.

I

A national awakening in India is almost always associated with or preceded by a religious revival. From very ancient times, the *gurukula* or forest academy, the *tapovana* or forest hermitage, and other centres of spiritual thought and culture have played a potent part in the moulding of the national life. Whether during the ancient days of the Kashyas and the Maithilas, or the later period of the empire of Ashoka or Vijayanagar, or the still later times of the renaissance in Bengal and the kingdom of the Sikhs and the Empire of the Mahrattas, one finds the same law operating, namely, a religious revival is followed by a surge of national vigour. Religion, which gives a characteristic colour to the life and culture, arts and literature, outlook and traditions in India, is the bed-rock on which the nation has been built. Think of India living through the centuries, and you think of her cultural, moral and spiritual idealism.

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Religion is the seed of her national life, which has remained intact in spite of invasions by the Huns and the Scythians, the Parthians and the Greeks, the Arabs and the Mongols, known to history, and also by the Gardabhilas, the Abhiras and the Bahalikas mentioned in the Puranas.

Studying the history of nineteenth-century India, one finds the same strange phenomenon repeating itself. The beginning of the last century was a period of cultural and national decline, of moral and spiritual degradation. The English had conquered large portions of the vast peninsula and made their influence felt in the rest of the land. This political subjugation of India was followed by an attempt at cultural conquest. The effects of an alien culture and civilization which the conquerors had brought with them into the country were intentionally reinforced by the foreign system of education which they spared no pains in introducing. India was taken by storm; she was dazzled by the glamour and glory of the West. She began to ape the conquerors not only in language, manners and dress, but also in education, culture and religion. Time, however, proved that the effect was only temporary: there came a great reaction when the self-forgetfulness produced by the glamour had passed away. The reaction was the outcome, not of any vengeful spirit, but of an innate urge for national and cultural self-expression. It proved to the hilt that the soul of India was not to be extinguished —the seed of life in the form of her *samskaras* and *vasanas*, the tendencies and impressions of scores of centuries of the collective life of her past, was still alive. The seed was simply passing through the dormant state preceding germination, only to sprout and flourish once again into the mighty tree of national life with branches and foliage, blossoms and fruits, that marked its everlasting genius.

India was therefore rediscovering herself in the last century. Her self-expression first took the form of a religious efflorescence. The other aspects of the renaissance—political and national, commercial and industrial, artistic, scientific and literary—came decades later. This was quite compatible with the genius of the people, for the keynote of the music of nationalism in India is neither politics nor commerce nor industry nor that spirit of national aggrandizement which ultimately results in national suicide, but religion, which expresses through a characteristic culture with a philosophic outlook and mystic idealism. In the nineteenth century, as in the past, history was repeating itself. A series of religious movements came into existence, which quickened the nation once again, so that in a few decades the national life began to flow free and clear. Of the religious teachers of the last century, Sri Ramakrishna together with his great spiritual aide, Swami Vivekananda, stands on the highest crest of the wave of the religious renaissance. They form the most complete and most comprehensive expression of the true spiritual and cultural idealism of India, and of the universal and synthetic principles of the Vedanta in all its varied aspects and all its varied depths. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna is fraught with profound cultural and spiritual significance for India and the world.

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II

Sri Ramakrishna was born on the 18th February 1836, in the quiet village of Kamarpukur in the Hooghly District of West Bengal. The village is nearly forty-five miles from Calcutta, as the crow flies. It was situated on the old road by which pilgrims from the north reached Puri. Decades ago, it was prosperous like most other Indian villages. One can see even today the ruins of its old buildings and temples, as well as the large mango groves dedicated for public use.

Better known and more visited than the place of his birth is the scene of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual austerities and attainments. It is called Dakshineswar and is situated a few miles from Calcutta.

When you travel about four miles up the Ganges in a ferry-boat or steamer from below the bridge linking Howrah with Calcutta, you come within sight of temples with dazzling white domes on your left at Belur. From the river at Belur you can see a new bridge in front, and also the large brownish dome of a temple beyond the bridge on your right. Nearly a couple of miles more up the river, and you land on the ghat of the Dakshineswar Temple, the dome of which you could see from Belur. The temple and surrounding gardens are well known as the scene of the spiritual struggles and illumination of Sri Ramakrishna. The temples at Belur with white domes which you had left behind are also held sacred; one of them contains the relics of the great Teacher who is worshipped by millions in India today as a man of God. A magnificent stone temple has been built on

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the lawn by the river, and dedicated to his memory. Both Dakshineswar and Belur breathe an air of spiritual peace. They are visited by thousands of pious men and women, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, who reach the place either by river or by road.

Sri Ramakrishna's boyhood was mostly spent in the quiet and beautiful village of Kamarpukur. At seven he lost his father. Simple and guileless, graceful and handsome, he was the favourite boy of the whole village. He was fond of religious music and recitals, as well as of making clay models of gods and goddesses.

When the boy was seventeen, his brother, Ramkumar, took him to Calcutta and put him in the primary school which he had opened there two years earlier. The boy was found unwilling to learn, for he considered that he was receiving only a bread-winning education. Years later, the building in which the school had been working was utilized as a place of worship, dedicated to Sri Krishna. It is still in use.

Ramkumar, who was becoming anxious about his younger brother, next got him appointed as a priest, first of the Radha-Govinda Temple, and then of the Kali Temple, at Dakshineswar, so that he might earn for the family. Sri Ramakrishna discharged his duties with a zeal and devotion which seemed to be promising. But, shortly after, his life took a new and unexpected turn. He used to become unconscious of the external world and developed strange moods. His meditations became deeper and deeper. To him the image of Kali was not a mere piece of sculpture, but he saw in its place the Divine Mother Herself. It was becoming impossible for him to continue the formal worship according to scriptural injunctions, for Ramakrishna the priest was being transformed into Ramakrishna the mystic.

With the appointment of Sri Ramakrishna as priest begins the first act of his life-drama, the early years forming a prologue. This act covers the whole period of his spiritual disciplines from 1855 to 1866, and consists of five principal scenes. The first scene opens with his calling on God as Mother and his first vision of God. The second, third and fourth scenes commence with his practice of the Tantra, Vaishnava and Advaita disciplines respectively. These first four scenes cover what mystic literature calls the period of purification, and to these may be added the fifth scene covering non-Hindu disciplines and experiences and forming a unique feature in the life of the great mystic of modern India.

If the purificatory period forms the first act of Sri Ramakrishna's life-drama, the illuminative and unitive periods form the last two acts. We are, however, concerned with the first act—with his spiritual struggles which resulted in illumination of a rare sublimity—in this and the next four chapters.

III

The moral and ethical preparation that Sri Ramakrishna underwent during the purificatory period and that formed a preliminary to his success in spiritual life has become classical in mystic literature. He rooted out the sexual and acquisitive instincts known in Hindu literature as *kamini* and *kanchana*—lust and lucre—by peculiar but remarkable processes. He would take a clod of earth in one hand and a few silver coins in the other, and weighing them both in the palm of his hand and judging them both to be equally useless for the attainment of God, throw them into the Ganges. He had trained himself so perfectly in this conquest of desire for and sense of possession that his fingers used to get twisted at the mere touch of a coin! The sexual instinct was conquered by the deification of woman—by looking upon her as a manifestation of the Divine Mother. With a view to eradicating sex-consciousness, he would suggest to himself that he was a woman, dress himself as a woman and move with women. He was perfectly pure. Alarmed at these strange ways and mystic moods, his old mother and his brother, who hoped that a change might come over him if he were to enter into the bonds of wedlock, married him to a girl of six. The marriage, which was done after the Hindu custom, was but a betrothal; and a betrothal it remained, nothing more. For when Sri Sarada Devi, as the girl was called, had come of age and gone to see her husband at Dakshineswar twelve years later, she was struck by his exalted spiritual illumination and became his first disciple. Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada did not live *en maritalement.* His marriage is unique in the history of saints, and is a true example of what has been called spiritual marriage, or marriage of souls, without any carnal taint. History furnishes only one example of a marriage apparently similar to that of Ramakrishna. It is that of Porphyry and Marcella; but Porphyry married at sixty, and Marcella, when wedded to him, was a widow with several children. This marriage is but a very faint parallel and cannot compare with that of Ramakrishna;[1] it deserves almost no notice in this context.

Not only in the conquest of lust and lucre was Ramakrishna perfect, but also in the other virtues which come under *yama* and *niyama*.[2]

IV

Who is Kali, whom Sri Ramakrishna was destined to worship on his appointment as priest of the temple, who was to become the pole-star of his life, his Chosen Ideal, his Divine Mother before whom he wept like Her child, in whom he confided, and whose guidance and help he sought and received? She is Shakti, the Power that creates, preserves and dissolves the universe, and brings it into being again. The significance of the worship of Kali becomes manifest to us when we consider the philosophy behind it.

Man usually worships God as the Creator or Giver of life, and the Preserver or Protector, whom he describes as *anandamaya* (full of bliss), as *premamaya* (full of love), and to whom he turns for saving grace. He, however, shuns His terrible aspect which manifests in Him as Destroyer. He instinctively turns away from any being that brings misery or anything that causes pain. In his inability to reconcile the conception of God as Creator and Preserver, with that of God as Destroyer, he creates in his mind a double universe—one blissful, the other full of misery. The one he calls the world of the blissful God and the other that of some dark fiendish being. Herein is the origin of the conception of Satan, which is the antithesis of the conception of God. However piously we may depict God as blissful and loving, the fact remains that the Reality manifests also in Its terrible aspect. This truth was realized as early as the days of the Vedas, when a *rishi* described all living beings as food for the omnipotent God, and death as His condiment.[1] What are called the dark and sunny sides of life are but the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Brightness and dimness are caused by variations in the quantity of light; but the light is one. Similarly, pleasure and pain are merely sensations, felt differently, but conveyed by the same nerves. Death does not mean extinction of life, but a change by which man leaves his physical vesture and remains in a state without the body, like the tree which exists as seed without foliage or fruits. When we view weal and woe, joys and sorrows, in the light of such a philosophical idea, life loses almost all its tragic seriousness and becomes a play.

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[1] See Kamakhya Nath Mitra, *Pessimism and Life's Ideal,* p. 18, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 1926.

[2] Non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-receiving of gifts constitute *yama.* Internal and external purification, contentment, mortification, study and worship of God make up *niyama.* Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras,* ii, 30 and 32.

Religion is philosophy in action. Lofty philosophical principles are embodied in the worship instituted by the Agamas.[2] Of the symbols used for worship and for the realization of the philosophy behind the terrible and tender aspects of God, the two most striking and significant are those of Nataraja and Kali, the one belonging to the Shaiva Agama and the other to the Shakta

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[1] *Katha Upanishad*, ii. 25.

[2] *Agama* literally means 'tradition', and so, a body of religious scripture that is handed down.

Agama. Both are in the pose of dancing, and both represent the processes of creation, preservation and destruction; but the figure of Kali is more terrible than that of Nataraja. The terrible aspect of Kali does not, however, prevent the followers of the Shakta Agama, trained according to its traditions, from appreciating the grandeur and sublimity of the symbol. She is represented as a nude, dark blue figure. She has three eyes; from Her neck hangs a garland of skulls, and round Her waist is a girdle of human arms. In Her lower left hand She holds a decapitated human head, and in the upper She wields a sword. With Her lower right hand She bestows boons on Her devotees, and the gesture of Her upper right hand signifies, 'Fear Nothing!' Her countenance beams with a smile as She dances on Shiva, Her consort, who is represented as lying motionless like a corpse under Her feet.

The symbol is full of spiritual meaning for the votary: the dark blue colour is that of infinity; the nudity signifies the 'unconditionally self-conditioned' nature of the Universal Energy whose joyous dance or sportive play is Life; the third eye is the eye of Knowledge; the garland of skulls and girdle of human arms, as well as the decapitated head and the sword in the left hands, represent the terrible side; and the right hands bestowing boons and fearlessness represent the gracious aspect. Kali is therefore both severe and sweet like Nature, creating and destroying, and creating and destroying again. Shiva lying inert like a corpse is the Absolute Intelligence beyond all creation, all activity. He is the Lord of Kali, for Kali who is Shakti or Cosmic Energy, is inseparable from Him whose Energy She is. Her dance on Shiva denotes the Shiva-Shakti *samyoga* or the union of Intelligence and Energy, from which proceeds the whole of creation and into which again it goes. The Energy that is personified as Kali is therefore not the inert and lifeless energy of the materialist, but the Divine Energy instinct with intelligence and purpose. It springs from and is ever associated with Intelligence Itself. It is called Brahmashakti (meaning Shakti or Energy of Brahman), and is the source of all creation and of all life, with their orderly scheme. The form ascribed to It is not the outcome of any poet's fancy, but a spiritual Reality which has been seen by saints in the past, and which can be seen by anyone who practises the necessary spiritual disciplines.

V

Such is the Hindu conception of Kali the Goddess, the Divine Mother of the universe, at whose feet Sri Ramakrishna dedicated his life and to whom he offered his whole-hearted devotion. He worshipped Her not as a priest, but as Her child who looked to Her, and Her alone, for guidance and protection. As days passed, he developed an extreme other-worldliness and a rare sensitivity which made him avoid the company of others. He used to spend the afternoons alone, and at night, when nature was at rest and everyone asleep, he would go to the dense jungle in the garden of Dakshineswar and meditate on Kali under the foot of the amlaka tree. The manner in which he prepared himself for the meditation was remarkable: he would strip himself of all clothing, and divest himself even of the sacred thread till he had finished his meditation. He considered these to be marks of shame and family ties, and believed that one should give up the eightfold fetters of hatred, shame, pedigree, culture, fear, fame, caste and egoism, when calling on God. He was passing through a part of the purificatory stage in mystic life.

When the agony of not having seen the Mother was intense, Sri Ramakrishna used to weep. Singing with feeling and fervour the songs of Ramprasad,[1] Kamalakanta,[2] and other poetic mystics of Bengal, he used to pray, 'O Mother! Reveal Thyself to me. Where art Thou? Ramprasad saw Thee and obtained Thy grace. Am I a wretch that Thou dost not show Thyself to me? I want neither pleasure nor enjoyments, nor friends nor wealth, I want only to see Thee, Mother.' When the bells of the temple would ring, announcing the time for evensong, he would cry out sadly: 'O Mother! Another day is spent in vain; I have not seen Thee. When shall I see Thee?' Again, when he would be in a mood of despair, he would enquire of the Mother, 'Could it be that Thou dost not exist? Art Thou merely a dream of diseased minds? Is religion a fiction of the cranky brain?' Then he would console himself by saying, 'O no, it can't be that She is a dream. Devotees have seen Her and realized Her as Truth.'

Grace came at last—what mystics call the 'awakening' occurred—and he had the first vision of the Divine Mother. Referring to it in later years, he described it in these words: 'One day I was feeling excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with a vision of the Divine Mother. I felt as if my heart was being wrung like a wet towel. I was writhing in agony as I feared that I might not have been destined to have the divine vision. Life had lost its taste for me. The idea then shot through my brain that I should end my life with the sword in the shrine room. My eyes fell on it; I jumped up like a madman and seized it, when suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself to me. The room with all its doors and windows, the temple and all, vanished from my sight completely, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their place there was a boundless effulgent ocean of consciousness or spirit. As far as the eye could reach, its shining billows were rushing towards me and in a short while engulfed me so completely that I was caught in the billows, was panting for breath, and fell down senseless, beating the floor. What happened after that in the world outside, or how that day or the next passed, I do not know, but within me there was a steady flow of ineffable bliss, the like of which I had not experienced before, and at the same time I was conscious of the presence of the Divine Mother as the inner core of my being. As soon as I regained consciousness, I called aloud, "Mother! Mother!" '

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[1] A well-known mystic of Bengal (1718–75).

[2] Another famous mystic of Bengal who lived in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth.

VI

From the day of the first vision onward, Sri Ramakrishna lived and moved in the spiritual realm, though he was in flesh and blood. He used to have strange visions and have communion with strange invisible beings. During meditation he used to hear strange rattling sounds in his joints from the ankles upward, as if somebody were locking them up one by one, so that the body might remain fixed. He would remain in that position till he had finished his meditation, after which the same rattling sounds would be heard again when the joints would be unlocked in the reverse order. Not until this was done would he be free to move or stand up. He had also other experiences. Sometimes he saw specks of light like a swarm of fireflies before his eyes; at other times a veil of luminous mist would envelop him. Again, he would see with closed, and with open eyes, luminous waves like molten silver, pervading everything. He also had a burning sensation all over the body, as if it had been smeared with caustic. This lasted for six months from the beginning of his *sadhana* period; and it was cured in a strange manner: he had a vision in which he saw the Papapurusha,[1] the symbol of the sin in man, as a red-eyed person of black complexion coming out of his body, reeling like a drunkard and walking in front of him. He then saw, shortly after, the figure of Shiva, calm and peaceful, wearing the ochre-coloured robe[2] and holding a trident in His hand, emerge from his (Ramakrishna's) body and attack the black man and kill him. A few days after the vision he was relieved of the burning sensation.

VII

Sri Ramakrishna's vision of Kali, the Divine Mother, was a mystical experience. What is mysticism? Who are mystics?

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[1] Means 'the sinful being', and corresponds to Mara who tempted Buddha, and Satan who tempted Jesus.

[2] Shiva is the Lord of monks and destroyer of all sins.

There have been mystics in all countries and in all ages. Those who were *rishis* (meaning seers) in the Vedic times in India were perhaps the oldest mystics in the world. There were mystics in ancient Egypt, Greece, among Siberian tribes, Eskimoes and the South Sea Islanders—Maoris and Melanesians. Mysticism is universal. It is held that all men are endowed with the mystical faculty, and the failure of most men to attain mystical experiences is due to the many detrimental physical and intellectual habits which impede the development of our spiritual instincts. St. Teresa says, 'God calls all men to His Grace.'

Nature of Mysticism

Vedic seers tell us that there are three forms of spiritual meditation, which are known as *sthula-dhyana*, *tejo-dhyana* and *sukshma-dhyana*. In the first, which is considered the lowest, visions of deities or of other figured entities are perceived. Sometimes voices giving definite messages are heard. In *tejo-dhyana*, which belongs to a higher rung on the ladder of spiritual practice, figures and persons disappear and the mystic beholds only various and fleeting lights and colours, or hears great musical strains. In the highest stage of *sukshma-dhyana* the seer experiences only contact with and merging in a tremendous Reality. 'Its quality, intensity and absolute being completely surpass any other human experience.'

There are three progressive aspects of the mystical experience. St. Ignatius highly appreciated divine visions, especially those related to the crucifixion of Jesus, whereas St. John of the Cross formally condemned such visions as impediments on the way to higher spiritual consciousness. Vedanta, popularly known as Hinduism, considers that in the highest spiritual consciousness there cannot be any visions, any images and the like, and when one attains it, one realizes the truth, that the Thing-in-itself in man and the Thing-in-itself in the universe are not two but one and identical. This is a teaching echoed by Plato.[1]

When mystics describe the holy figures they have seen in visions, they endow them with the aspects of the familiar religious images, in particular with those of their familiar deity.[2] This is why a Hindu *bhakta* (devotee) sees Shiva or Vishnu or Durga and so on, whereas a Christian sees Jesus or the Virgin Mary or any of the Christian saints. A Buddhist may see any of the great Buddhas, and a Muslim may see a *houri* from the paradise of the Prophet. In the West, there is a tendency on the part of many people to reject mysticism. Such persons forget that the visions the mystics see and the voices that the mystics hear are milestones on the path of progress. They would do well to remember the following features of mystics and mystical life:

(1) Mystics attain great peace when they see visions or hear voices.

(2) They often receive warnings for their future, and are told what they should do and what they should not do.

(3) The words they hear and the figures they see

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[1] Dr. Jacques de Marquette: *Introduction to Comparative Mysticism.*
[2] Ibid.

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arise from the depth of their being and cannot be dismissed as fanciful or imaginary. The forms they see are like waves that arise from the ocean and they have a substratum of reality. There are mystics who attain this Reality without having much to do with forms of holy figures and figurines. Usually those who realize the formless Reality are the *jnanis* (wise men), and those who seek divine love, divine forms, and divine voices are the *bhaktas* (devotees). The impersonal and the personal are not considered contradictory in India. In the words of Swami Vivekananda: 'They are the obverse and the reverse of the same coin.'

(4) Mystic experiences often bring about a change in the physical configuration of the devotee. In ecstatic states the mystic sweats profusely, sometimes feels a burning sensation all over the body, and some of the mystics may feel a ravenous hunger. Specialists who have trodden the path prescribe remedies to cure them.

(5) Often great powers come to the mystic, such as light emanating from his body, becoming invisible, etc., but he rejects them, and without caring for them marches onward to the highest goal.

VIII

Divine visions are not the goal of *sadhanas* (spiritual disciplines). Sri Ramakrishna's bliss was not unmixed, for though he had had the vision of the Divine Mother, he did not have Her constant and uninterrupted realization. He could get a glimpse of Her only in meditation or through some effort. His faith in Her as his sole Guide and Comforter was unshakable. He believed like a child that he was unable to see Her, because She, in playful mood, was hiding Herself purposely. He had taken refuge in Her; now he prayed that his ego might be merged in Her will, and he might be Her instrument. Slowly his realization deepened more and more. He could now see the Divine Mother more vividly and in Her entire form. She spoke to him and directed him in his daily duties. While he was offering food to Her in former days, he used to see a luminous ray proceeding from Her eyes, touching it and taking its essence; now he saw Her partake of the food even before it was offered in the regular way according to scriptural rules. Formerly he looked upon the image of the Mother as imbued with consciousness; now the image disappeared and in its place stood the Mother smiling and blessing him. He used to feel Her breath on his hand. At night when the room was lighted, he did not see Her divine form cast any shadow on the walls, even though he looked closely. From his own room he could hear Her going to the upper storey of the temple, Her anklets jingling. When he would see if he were mistaken, he would find Her standing with flowing hair, facing Calcutta or looking over the Ganges.

He lost all sense of awe when he went to the shrine. He did not approach the image of Kali with a timid heart, nor make prostrations as he entered the temple or keep himself at a respectful distance from the pedestal. For was not Kali his own Mother? How could he act so before Her? As one entered the temple, one would feel a thrill when Sri Ramakrishna was worshipping, for one felt the living presence of the Mother there. His manner of worship was strange and not in conformity with scriptural injunctions, for he would take *vilva*[1] leaves and flowers in his hand, touch with them his own head, chest, in fact the whole body including the feet, and then offer them at the feet of Kali. At other times he would move towards the image with tottering steps like an intoxicated man and touch the chin of the Mother as a mark of endearment, or sing or dance, or laugh or joke. Sometimes he would take a morsel of food in his hand, and putting it to the lips of the Mother, would enquire, 'Well, Thou wishest me to eat —shall I eat now? Very well, I shall do so;' with these words he would eat a portion and put the remainder to the mouth of the Goddess, adding, 'Well, I have finished, now it is Thy turn.' So also, when he would invite Her to retire after the evening service was over, he would say, 'Thou wishest me to lie down? Very well, I shall do so,' and would lie for some time on the silver bedstead of Kali. Again, as he gathered flowers for making garlands for the Mother, he would address or caress somebody, or laugh or sing in merriment! He had spiritually transformed himself into the son of Kali the Mother. He was in the madness of divine ecstasy, and was experiencing the thrill of the God-intoxicated state. Here ends the first scene of his life-drama.

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[1] Whose leaves are considered sacred for worship.

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CHAPTER IV

ON THE PATH OF THE TANTRAS

I. Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with the Tantrik *guru*. II. The teachings of the Tantras. III. Sri Ramakrishna's practice of the Tantras and experiences.

I

There was an irrepressible spiritual urge in Sri Ramakrishna which impelled him to practise one *sadhana* or spiritual discipline after another, after the realization of Kali the Mother. Had he however chosen not to undergo new spiritual disciplines, he would nevertheless have lived and died a saint of an exalted type, for he had become well established in spiritual life. His relationship with the Divine Mother as Her son had become a spiritual fact. His purity, devotion, renunciation and other divine qualities would have entitled him not merely to the rank of a *siddha* (saint), but to that of a *guru* (teacher). The Divine Mother, however, had many more precious treasures in store for him. He had played the divine music of his soul in response to the inner call; but his soul's songs were in the years to come to run the whole gamut of Hinduism in all its scales and all its notes, in all its varied melodies and all its diverse tunes.

The second stage of Ramakrishna's spiritual life was soon to begin; he was preparing to tread the Tantrik path—the path of spiritual dynamism. In 1861, about

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five years after the first vision of the Divine Mother and first God-intoxicated state, Sri Ramakrishna took up the practice of the Tantras. He was then twenty-five years old. The *guru* who initiated him in this mode of *sadhana* was Bhairavi Brahmani, a Brahmin lady of high spiritual attainments and profound scholarship. Both the teacher and the disciple recognized each other at first sight. She removed the doubts and misgivings that he had as to the spiritual realizations he had already attained, by confirming his experiences and declaring them to be perfectly true and valid. She rightly diagnosed also the severe burning sensation he had all over the body and the ravenous appetite which he had experienced, as symptoms of *mahabhava*.[1] Recognizing them to be identical with those from which Sri Radha, of Vaishnavite literature, and Sri Chaitanya, of medieval history, had suffered, she treated him according to the scriptural injunctions, and cured him. She recognized him to be a rare soul—an incarnation of Divinity who had come into the world for the good of humanity.

II

The Tantras, like the Vedic rites of old, combine both enjoyment and renunciation. These Scriptures recognize that though God should be worshipped in the purest way possible, most men are too weak to follow the higher path of strict discipline which calls for perfect control of the mind and the senses. They, however, do not countenance weakness of the senses and other frailties of the average man, but sublimate them by a process in which the sense objects are deified, and the struggling soul is taught to look upon them as visible representations of the Divine. They teach the Motherhood of God, and, along with it also, the sanctity of woman. The votary worships God as the Mother of the universe—as its Creator, Preserver and Destroyer—as the ever-affectionate Mother who brings him into being, protects him, gathers him to Herself after death, and sends him again into the world until he attains Freedom by Her grace. If he does this, it is natural that whenever the thought of woman comes into his mind or he sees her form, he associates it with the idea of divinity. His mind is thus educated and purified.

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[1] The highest form of spiritual ecstasy, in which the bliss and emotion of realizing the Lord in manifold forms of human relations is concentrated.

Whereas in the Vedas the ritualistic and philosophical portions are distinct branches, in the Tantras they are intimately connected. If a devotee practises the Tantras properly, he will find himself on a high spiritual level at the end of his *sadhanas* (spiritual practices). In every act of worship the Tantrik system enjoins some kind of meditation on the unity of the devotee with the Lord—of the individual soul with the Oversoul. During worship one has mentally to raise the *kundalini shakti*—the Divine power in everyone, or resultant of all the good tendencies and impressions of the personality, represented as coiled up at the lowest extremity of the spinal column—to the *sahasrara* or the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain, and meditate on the Lord there. Then he is to imagine the identity of the *jiva*-Shiva (the symbol of the aspirant himself) with the Paramashiva, the Supreme Lord residing in the *sahasrara*. When this meditation is over, he is to imagine himself as separate

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from Him, and conceive the spirit of the Lord as condensing and assuming the form of the god or the goddess whom he wants to worship. He then projects Him or Her out of himself onto the image or symbol before him and conducts the worship. After the worship is over, he mentally withdraws the Deity into himself. The effect of such meditation and worship is clear; it is to realize the identity of the soul with the Lord by directing the mind of the aspirant to the underlying unity of all existence.

In accordance with the spiritual capacities of the aspirants, the Tantras prescribe three different modes of practice, namely, *pashubhava*, *virabhava* and *divyabhava* (or the animal, heroic and divine attitudes) in ascending order. In the class of devotees who are fit only for the first mode of practice, there is a preponderance of animal propensities. They are instructed to be strictly clean and pure, avoid all objects of temptation as far as possible, and engage themselves in *japa*[2] and such other spiritual practices. The second class of aspirants are comparatively advanced. In them devotion to God rises above the cravings of the senses; sense attractions only heighten their yearning for God. Such devotees are advised to follow the *virabhava*—to live in the midst of temptations and try to concentrate on the Lord, unaffected by the forces in the external world unfavourable to their spiritual progress. The third and highest type of Tantrik aspirant is he whose purity, truthfulness, forgiveness, compassion, absence of jealousy, non-violence and other divine qualities have become well established and natural.

[1] Repetition of *mantras* or holy names.

Self-control, then, is the key to success in the Tantrik system; and its exercises are so graded as to help the devotee in attaining self-mastery, without which spiritual progress under any system of spiritual disciplines is out of the question. The Tantras have been degraded, not because they are bad in themselves, but on account of the depravity of their followers.

III

Sri Ramakrishna sought and obtained the permission of the Divine Mother to practise these disciplines; for She was his Guide and Protector without whose blessings he could not undertake anything new. His *guru* used to instruct him to perform the worship of Mother Kali and practise meditations. When he began to tell beads, he would be overwhelmed with divine fervour and fall into a deep trance. He used to experience a variety of wonderful visions. They followed each other in quick succession, and Sri Ramakrishna could feel the effects of the practices most tangibly. The Brahmani put him through all the disciplines mentioned in the sixty-four Tantras. Sri Ramakrishna attained perfection in every course in the incredibly short period of three days. Referring to the practices, Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'Most of these were extremely difficult—some of them so dangerous that they cause the devotee to lose his footing and sink into moral degradation. But the infinite grace of the Divine Mother carried me through them unscathed.' It need hardly be said that to a man of his moral calibre and spiritual attainments, wine and sex-indulgence, which are allowed by the system in certain stages, were repugnant. To his great glory must it be said that he practised the disciplines without these, and thus restored the ancient Tantrik practices to their original purity.

As a result of practising the Tantrik disciplines, Sri Ramakrishna experienced the upward march of the *kundalini shakti*.[1] Referring to this he used to say, 'So long as it does not reach the brain, I remain conscious; but the moment it does so, I am dead to the world. The eyes and the ears cease to function and speaking is out of the question. Who can then speak to whom? The very distinction between 'I' and 'thou' vanishes. When the *kundalini shakti* comes up to the heart or even the throat, it is possible to speak, and I do so; but the moment it rises above the throat, I feel as if someone stops my mouth, and I cannot utter a word.' Many times Sri Ramakrishna attempted to relate his experiences when the *kundalini shakti* went above the throat, but he failed. One day he was determined to make a special effort and went on describing his experiences until the power reached the throat. Then, pointing to

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[1] This is the coiled-up power already mentioned. It passes through seven *chakras* or centres which are described thus by *yogis*:

The *sushumna* canal (or the central canal, as Western physiology would put it) runs through the middle of the spinal cord from the *muladhara* (the sacral plexus), which is the first and lowest of the centres, to the *sahasrara* or the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain, which is the last and highest centre. The five other centres in between are called *swadhishthana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishuddha* and *ajna*. In the *muladhara* the *kundalini* is said to sleep. When roused by spiritual efforts, it forces its way through the *sushumna* canal upwards first to the *swadhishthana*, then to the *manipura*, and so on, till it reaches the *sahasrara*. As it rises higher, step by step, layer after layer of the mind is revealed, and wonderful powers and experiences come to the *yogi*. When it reaches the *sahasrara* he becomes perfectly free from the limitations of body and mind, transcends the ego, and attains the highest realization of Truth.

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the sixth centre, level with the junction of the eyebrows, he said, 'When the mind reaches this point, one gets a vision of the Paramatman and falls into *samadhi*. Only a thin transparent veil intervenes between the *jiva* (individual soul) and the Paramatman (Oversoul). He then sees like this. . . .' But as he attempted to explain it in detail, he became lost in *samadhi* (superconsciousness). When his mind came down a little, he tried again, but again failed, for he became immersed in *samadhi*. After repeated attempts which were all in vain, he said with tears in his eyes, 'Well, what shall I do, I sincerely wish to tell you everything but Mother gags me; She won't let me do so.'

Sri Ramakrishna used to point out that the Scriptures speak of five different kinds of movement of the *kundalini*, which are like those of an ant, a frog, a serpent, a bird and a monkey. He would also compare the centres to the planes referred to in the Vedanta, and relate the experiences in the language of the latter. 'The Vedanta speaks of seven planes in which the mind moves and works. The ordinary man's mind moves and works only in the three lower centres and is content with satisfying itself through the common appetites—eating, drinking, sleeping, begetting. But when it reaches the fourth centre opposite the heart, man sees a divine effulgence. From this state, however, he often lapses back to the three lower centres. When the mind comes to the fifth centre opposite the throat, the spiritual aspirant cannot speak of anything but God. While I was in this state, which comes when the mind reaches this centre, I felt as though violently struck on the head if anyone spoke of worldly topics. Since I could not bear

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such talk, I used to run to the Panchavati[1] where I was safe.

'Even from this state a man may slip down; he should therefore be very watchful. But he need not have any fear of a fall when the mind reaches the sixth centre level with the junction of the eyebrows. He gets the vision of the Paramatman,(Oversoul) andremains always in *samadhi* (superconsciousness). His mind, however, is not really merged in the Paramatman, for there is a thin transparent veil between the sixth centre and the *sahasrara*, the highest centre. He is however so near the Paramatman that he imagines that he is merged in Him. From this state the mind can come down to the fifth or at the most to the fourth centre, but not below that.' Sri Ramakrishna used to remark that ordinary spiritual aspirants classed as *jivas* cannot come down from this state, but after remaining in *samadhi* (superconsciousness) for twenty-one days without a break, they rend the thin veil and become one with the Paramatman (Oversoul). The body of such a man dies. This eternal union of the *jiva* with the Paramatman is known as going to the seventh plane. Only the Avataras or Incarnations destined to be Teachers of mankind can come back from this exalted state, and live for the good of others.

Sri Ramakrishna also had other experiences as a result of the Tantrik practices, which mark the second stage of his onward march. His mind rose to the higher plane beyond the distinction between the holy and the unholy. He became like a child and could not keep on

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[1] The cluster of five trees under which Sri Ramakrishna carried on his spiritual disciplines.

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his wearing-cloth or even the sacred thread; in spite of his efforts they would drop off. Even a street girl used to remind him of the Mother. Words offensive to ordinary men appeared to him as but a group of letters and every letter to him was a symbol of the Divine Mother. They sometimes even induced in him *samadhi* on account of their spiritual suggestions. He would find himself wrapped in the flames of knowledge both inside and outside. He often heard the Anahata—a great solemn sound like Pranava (Om), produced by the blending of the variety of all the sounds in the universe. It is also said that he could understand at this time the language of birds and beasts. He acquired the eight kinds of supernatural powers which make a man almost an omnipotent being. But the Divine Mother showed him in a vision that these powers were worthless for a real devotee; he therefore spurned them and warned his devotees against them. He also saw innumerable gods and goddesses. Some of them talked to him and advised him in various ways. Of all these Rajarajeswari, or Shodashi, was the most beautiful.

His complexion acquired at this time a golden colour on account of his spiritual practices. Since it attracted the attention of all, he prayed to the Mother, saying, 'Take back Thy outward beauty, Mother, and give me instead Thy inner beauty and purity of spirit.' So saying he stroked the body gently and repeated, 'Dive inward.' After that the golden complexion disappeared. The revelation came to him at this time that many devotees would flock to him later on for spiritual instructions and guidance. He had also a vision of the Divine Maya[1]

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[1] The Power that creates, preserves and destroys.

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in the form of a woman of exquisite beauty, who gave birth to a lovely child, was nursing it with the utmost tenderness, and then destroyed it again by crushing it between her grim jaws and swallowing it.

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CHAPTER V

IN THE THROES OF DIVINE LOVE

I. The path of love or devotion. II. The five *bhavas* or modes taught by the Vaishnava Scriptures—the *shanta, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya,* and *madhura.* III. Sri Ramakrishna's disciplines in the various modes and his experience of God as Master. IV. The episode of Ramlala (Child Rama) —Experience of God as Child. V. Love Transcendental and its goal. VI. Realization of Sri Krishna, the Divine Beloved.

I

The Tantrik worship is the worship of Shakti or Power. *Karma* in the form of rituals and ceremonials, *bhakti* or devotion to the Ideal worshipped, *jnana* in the form of meditation on the *jiva*-Shiva (the individual soul) and the Paramashiva (the Supreme Soul) with a view to effecting their union, and *yoga* or psychic control—all these find a place in the Tantrik method.

It was only natural that Sri Ramakrishna should have a desire to realize God through love or devotion alone. He therefore attempted to explore the realms of *bhakti* or devotion to God, to which the one and only avenue is love. He wanted to direct the entire soul of his being to the God of Love, live in Him and commune with Him in diverse aspects. Sri Ramakrishna was now entering the third stage of his journey to God.

The path of love is at once the easiest and most natural. Our very life is an expression of love, if we only knew it. Every movement of life—every act of man or woman, boy or girl—is guided and controlled by love. The object or ideal on which love is projected, however, varies. Love works in lower or higher planes: the thief robs, and the philanthropist spends his wealth in charity; the sinner sins, and the saint is godlike. But behind all these there is the working of one and the same motive force called love, though expressing in different and sometimes opposite directions. The lower the ideal or object of love, the greater the reaction in the form of misery that follows in the wake of happiness. The only ideal or object which does not bring about such reaction is God or the Perfect Being, the Highest and Absolute Love.[1]

II

God may be worshipped and realized in one or more of five *bhavas* or attitudes called *shanta*, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya* and *madhura*. These are human representations of the Divine Ideal of Love. The nature of the supreme and absolute ideal of Love is incomprehensible even by the highest flight of the imagination. Nevertheless the followers of the path of Love, from the very beginning of its history and in all countries and climes, have felt impelled to attempt to describe their own loving relation with God; in doing so they have had to fall back on the limited range of human relationships of love, and the all too inadequate language of those relationships.

There has been a tendency among Western psycho-

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[1] Swami Vivekananda, *Bhakti-Yoga.*

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logists to take the view, when confronted with the lives of saints who looked on God as Father, for instance, that these were persons who had not established a satisfactory relationship with their earthly fathers, and had resorted to God as a substitute. But to the mind permeated by the Indian tradition, all human relations are relations between souls, which are in essence God: the soul is, as it were, an aspect, a limitation, of God. The relation between the soul and God cannot therefore be a glorified imitation of, or substitute for, an earthly relation, as some modern psychologists would have it. Rather, the reverse is the case: the earthly relation is a faint imitation, an inadequate symbol, of the eternal relation between the soul and God.

The relation between the soul and God is the archetype, and such relationships as father, mother, son, master, friend, lover, and all other imaginable relationships and variations and combinations of relationships, are sectional views, as it were, of that one integral relationship—if relationship it can be called where, as in Advaita Vedanta, there are 'not two'. The five principal modes of Vaishnavite worship which are now to be described, may appear more rational if this is borne in mind.

The least intense form in which divine love is apprehended is the *shanta* or the peaceful attitude. It is the placid attitude of mind cultivated by some *rishis* who lead a simple and holy life away from the tumult of the world, practising self-control and meditation on God as the innermost Self of the universe, and as the only Reality. There is usually a tinge of Advaita (non-dualism) in this kind of worship. The Vedic *rishis* are examples of such devotion. The *dasya*—the relationship of servant to Master—is the next higher type. Reflection on the complex scheme of the universe naturally leads to the conception of a Lord possessed of all power, all knowledge and all mercy, governing in accordance with fixed laws. The devotee renders Him loyal service forgetful of personal comfort and even at the risk of life itself, feeling himself the servant and God the Master. The devotion of Hanuman for Sri Ramachandra,[1] the King of Ayodhya, who is considered by Hindus to be an Incarnation of the Lord Himself, is a typical example: Hanuman is considered the pattern of faithful service and loyalty.

The third way is *sakhya* or friendship. In this the devotee looks upon God as his dearest Friend, feels no constraint in His presence and becomes satisfied with simply making Him happy. God is the Eternal Playmate, and life is His play in which the devotee participates. When the play is over, he leaves it and lives in eternal comradeship with the Lord. Arjuna and the cowherd boys of Vrindavan regarded Sri Krishna[2] as a Friend. *Vatsalya*, the fourth mode, is the relationship between parent and child, in which God is loved not as our Parent, but as our Child. There is no element of fear or veneration in this path, nor is there any hankering for powers. The attitude of the parents of Sri Krishna towards their Divine Child is an instance.

Lastly comes the *madhura* or the relationship between lovers. This is the most intense form of attachment in

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[1] The divine hero of the *Ramayana*.

[2] The *Srimad Bhagavatam* and the *Mahabharata* record the life and achievements of Sri Krishna.

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which the least idea of separation becomes unbearable —God is the Sweetheart, a part and parcel of one's being. The *gopis* or milkmaids of Vrindavan[1] are examples of it. It is higher than all the foregoing methods of worship and includes them all; it is the consummation of all the other forms of devotion. The votary on this path serves his Beloved like a servant, counsels Him, rejoices and sympathizes in His joys and sorrows like a friend, and watches over His mental and physical comforts like a mother. The perfect devotee of this type is obviously one who looks only to the comfort of the Beloved, regardless of his own personal happiness or convenience.

III

Sri Ramakrishna successfully practised all the five modes of Vaishnava worship. During the first four years of his *sadhana*, Sri Ramakrishna adopted the *shanta* or calm and placid attitude towards the Deity and realized It in that aspect.

Sri Ramakrishna also worshipped God as Master by emulating Hanuman[2] and offering his heart's devotion to Sri Ramachandra. He performed this form of *sadhana* in 1856 shortly after his first vision of Kali. He was then only twenty years old. Convinced that the quickest way to realize Rama would be by becoming thoroughly imbued with the spirit of His greatest devotee, Hanuman, he took it upon himself to reproduce as faithfully as possible Hanuman's attitude towards Rama. He used to speak of the process and results of this form of practice in these words: 'By constant meditation on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I did not feign them; they came naturally to me. I tied my cloth round the waist, letting a portion of it hang down in the form of a tail, and jumped from place to place instead of walking. I lived on fruits and roots only, and these I preferred to eat without peeling. I passed most of my time in trees, calling out in a solemn voice, "Raghuvir!" My eyes looked restless like those of a monkey, and most wonderful of all, the end of my spine enlarged by about an inch.[1] It gradually resumed its former size after that phase of the mind had passed. In fact I was more like a monkey than a human being in every respect.'

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[1] The love of the *gopis* for Sri Krishna is depicted in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

[2] In the *Ramayana* are described the arduous efforts of Hanuman to help Rama, his divine Master, in winning back Sita, the beloved wife of Rama, who was carried away by Ravana, the king of the Rakshasas.

At the end of this *sadhana* Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful vision. Referring to it he said, 'One day I was seated in the place now known as the Panchavati in quite a normal state of mind—not at all entranced—when all of a sudden a luminous female figure appeared before me. The place was illumined with the lustre radiating from her. I perceived not her alone, but also the trees, the Ganges and everything. I observed that it was a human figure, being without such characteristics as three eyes and so on; but such a sublime countenance, expressive of love, sorrow, compassion and fortitude, is not commonly met with even in goddesses. Slowly she advanced from the north towards me, looking graciously on me all the while. I was amazed and was wondering who she might be, when a monkey with a cry suddenly jumped and sat by her. Then the idea flashed within me that this must be Sita, whose whole life had been centred in Rama and who had misery only as her lot! In an excess of emotion I was about to fall at her feet crying, "Mother", when she entered into my body, with the significant remark that she bequeathed the smile on her lips to me! I fell unconscious on the ground, overpowered with emotion. This was the first vision I had with eyes wide open, without meditation on anything. Is it because my first vision of Sita was of her grief-stricken aspect that my subsequent life contained so much suffering? Who knows!'

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[1] Cf. the stigmata impressed on the body of St. Francis.

Sri Ramakrishna also adopted the *sakhya* or attitude of a friend towards the Divinity in the manner of Sridama, Sudama and other companions of Sri Krishna, and realized It in that aspect.

IV

Sri Ramakrishna attained perfect success in the practice of the *vatsalya bhava* as well. The remarkable experiences that resulted from it form a thrilling episode in his life. In 1864, when he was past twenty-eight years of age, he came into contact with a Vaishnava saint called Jatadhari, who had practised lifelong devotion to Sri Ramachandra as a Divine Child, and used to carry with him a small metallic image of Ramlala (Child Rama) for purposes of worship. His spiritual attainments were very high, for he used to feel the constant presence of his Deity. The service of Ramlala was his

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sole preoccupation. He caressed Him, nursed Him, fed Him; he played with Him and chastised Him when He was naughty. He had never told anyone of his vision. Sri Ramakrishna watched his devotion to Ramlala, and, being intimately familiar with the various states of divine consciousness, discovered Jatadhari's secret.

'The Babaji', said Sri Ramakrishna later to a group of disciples, 'was the lifelong devotee of Ramlala, whom he carried wherever he went. He would cook whatever he got by begging and offer it to Him. He actually found that Ramlala took the food. Sometimes He would demand something else. On occasions He would act like a spoiled child.

'Jatadhari was engaged day and night in serving Him and was in a state of constant bliss. I could see the actions of Ramlala; so I used to spend the whole day with the Babaji in order to watch Him. Days passed in this way and Ramlala became more and more intimate with me. As long as I remained with Jatadhari, Ramlala was cheerful; but the moment I left, He followed me to my room. No argument would move Him. At first I thought that it might be an hallucination, for how could Ramlala prefer me—practically a stranger—to Jatadhari whose life had been spent in serving Him? I argued that I might be deceived once or twice, but this scene was repeated every day. I saw Ramlala as vividly as I see you all—now dancing gracefully before me, now springing on my back, or insisting on being taken up in my arms. Sometimes I would hold Him on my lap. He would not remain there, but run to the fields in the sun, pluck flowers from thorny bushes, or jump into the Ganges. I would remonstrate saying, "Don't run in the sun; your feet will get blistered;" or "Don't remain so long in water; you will catch cold and get fever." But Ramlala would turn a deaf ear. He would fix His beautiful eyes on me and smile, or, like a naughty boy, He would go on with His pranks, or pout His lips or make faces at me. Sometimes I would lose my temper and cry, "Wait, you naughty boy, I am going to beat you black and blue." I would drag Him away, and diverting Him with various toys, ask Him to play inside the room. But sometimes I lost patience and slapped Him; with tearful eyes and trembling lips He would look at me. Oh, what pain I would feel then for having punished Him! I would take Him on my lap and console Him. All these things actually happened.

'One day', Sri Ramakrishna continued, 'I was going to bathe. Ramlala insisted on accompanying me, so I took Him with me. But He would not come out of the water, nor did He heed my remonstrances. Then I got angry and pressing Him under the water said, "Now play in it as much as you like." Ah! I saw Him struggling for breath; then, repenting of my act, I took Him up in my arms. Another incident pained me greatly, and I wept bitterly over it. He insisted on having something which I could not supply. To divert Him I gave Him some parched rice not well husked. As He was chewing it, I found His tender tongue was scratched. This sight was too much for me. I took Him on my lap and cried out, "Mother Kausalya[1] used to feed you with cream or butter with the greatest care, and I was so thoughtless as to give you this coarse stuff." ' In recounting the incident Sri Ramakrishna was over-

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[1] The mother of Rama.

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powered by the same feeling and wept so bitterly that his hearers were moved to tears. They had a faint glimpse of his impassioned love for Ramlala.

'Sometimes the Babaji,' Sri Ramakrishna went on, 'after cooking his food, could not find Ramlala. Being sorely distressed he would run to my room, and find Ramlala playing with me. In wounded pride the *sadhu* would say, "The food is ready; I have been searching for You, and here You are, playing at ease! Well, that is Your nature. You do whatever You like. You have no feelings. You are hard-hearted and unkind. You left your parents and went to the forest. Your father died of a broken heart, but You did not return even to see him on his death-bed." Scolding thus he would take Ramlala away and feed Him. The Babaji stayed here for a long time, because Ramlala would not go away from me, and the Babaji could not leave behind his dearly beloved Ramlala.

'One day Jatadhari, weeping, came to me and said, "Ramlala out of His infinite grace has fulfilled my desire. He has revealed Himself to me in the form I prefer. Also He has told me that He will not go and leave you behind; but I am not distressed on that account: I am filled with joy to see Him live here happily and play with you. I am satisfied when He is happy; I shall gladly leave Him and go my way. It gladdens my heart to think that He is happy in your company." With these words Jatadhari left Ramlala with me and bade adieu to Dakshineswar. Ever since, Ramlala has been here.'

Such in brief is the story of Sri Ramakrishna's *vatsalya* form of devotion to Sri Rama. While practising it, he

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became possessed with the idea that he was a woman, which became intensified through the feminine quality of his inherent tenderness. He felt the same motherly tenderness for Sri Rama, the Divine Child, as the Queen Kausalya did. Before Jatadhari left Dakshineswar, he initiated Sri Ramakrishna into the *vatsalya* form of worship. In a few days Sri Ramakrishna was blessed with a constant vision of Sri Ramachandra as the Divine Child. He also realized that He who appeared before him as the son of King Dasharatha, also pervaded every being—that He projected the universe and transcended it in His aspect of Pure Brahman, the One without name, form or attribute.

V

The last and highest form of Vaishnava *sadhana* undertaken by Sri Ramakrishna was the *madhura bhava* or the relation between a woman and her lover. As the aspirant proceeds from the *shanta* to the *madhura*, he is impressed less and less with the grandeur of his Ishtam (Chosen Ideal) and becomes more and more intimate with the object of his adoration, until in *madhura bhava*, the highest of the *bhavas*, the intimacy is deepest and the union closest between the worshipper and the Ideal. This form of worship is exemplified in the Vrindavan episode of Sri Krishna's life in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, which describes how the *gopis* or milkmaids of Vrindavan were mad for Krishna. It is only natural that in describing the bliss and sentiments of *madhura bhava*, the imagery clothed as it is in the language of passionate human love, may appear sensual in the extreme; but the bliss and the sentiments described are transcendental, far beyond the reach of the mind and the senses. Nay, without perfect self-control and mastery of the senses such realization is impossible.

In the *madhura bhava* Sri Krishna, who stands for the Paramatman or Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, is the Purusha or the Male Principle of the universe; and everything with form or without, gross or subtle, is Prakriti or Nature, which is the Female Principle, the Consort of the Purusha. The attitudes (*bhavas*) characteristic of Prakriti or the Female Principle are different modes of approach to the Purusha, personified in the *gopis* of Vrindavan. Chief among these *gopis* is Sri Radha who is closest to her Lord and becomes merged in Him, who is the *mahabhava*—the synthesis and goal of all the other *bhavas*. If one worships the Lord whole-heartedly through any one of the *bhavas*, one attains *mahabhava*, and through it the Bliss Absolute. Radha's relationship with Krishna combines service of the Beloved like a *dasya* (servant), the joy of companionship with Him like a *sakhya* (friend), and ministration to his needs and comforts as to a *vatsa* (child).

Spiritual history bears testimony to the fact that changes in the physical configuration including complete sexual transformation of the votary takes place as the result of intense and fiery devotion to the Lord in the *madhura bhava*. The devotee becomes imbued with the idea that he belongs to the opposite sex. But the Real man is neither man nor woman, and ultimately the devotee rises to the plane beyond consciousness of sex.

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VI

In the same year in which he practised the *vatsalya bhava*, Sri Ramakrishna, prayed to the Divine Mother for permission to practise the *madhura bhava* and attain success in realizing Sri Krishna as his Beloved. He then began to devote all the energy of his soul to the practice of this *sadhana*. The burning sensation, which he experienced all over the body twice before, appeared again. Minute drops of blood began to ooze from the pores of his skin. At times the joints of his body seemed to be loosened. Owing to the intensity of his anguish, his senses would stop functioning, and he looked like a corpse. The world had seldom seen such zeal. According to tradition, which tells of the need of propitiating Radha, who is the Beloved of Krishna and nearest to Him, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to her with fervour and devotion. Within a short time she revealed herself to him. This time also he felt the figure vanish into his own body. He used to say, 'It is impossible to describe the heavenly beauty and sweetness of Radha. Her very appearance showed that she had forgotten all personal considerations in her passionate love for Sri Krishna. Her complexion was light yellow.'

Subsequent to this experience Sri Ramakrishna began to feel himself to be Radha. His constant meditation on her obliterated his own personality and transformed him. Bhairavi Brahmani, his Tantrik *guru*, and learned devotees who were with him, were amazed at this and found it to be the same as the unique state of Radha

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described in the Puranas and the same as that of Sri Chaitanya,[1] hundreds of years later. Sri Ramakrishna referring to this period of his *sadhana* said, 'The manifestation in the same individual of nineteen different kinds of emotion towards God is described in the books on *bhakti* as *mahabhava*. An ordinary man takes a whole lifetime to realize even a single one of these. But in this body (meaning himself) there has been a perfect manifestation of all the nineteen.' His complete identification with Sri Radha and meditation with passionate attachment upon Sri Krishna brought him in a short time to the consummation of his practices. Sri Krishna revealed Himself to him in His exquisitely graceful form, and fulfilled the longing of his soul. Then He merged Himself in the person of Sri Ramakrishna, who remained for three or four months in a state of divine felicity. At times, forgetting his own identity he looked upon himself as Krishna, at others, he saw Him manifested in all creatures, sentient and insentient. Sri Krishna appeared blue in complexion.

There was one particularly significant vision that Sri Ramakrishna had during this period: One day he was seated in the verandah of the Vishnu Temple listening to the reading of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, when he fell into an ecstatic mood and saw the resplendent form of Krishna. Next he found that luminous rays issuing from His feet in the form of a stout rope touched first the *Srimad Bhagavatam* and then his own chest, connecting for some time all three. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'After this vision, I came to realize that God, His devotee and the Scriptures which are His words, though they appear to be distinct entities, are in reality one and the same.'

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[1] The great Vaishnava saint of Bengal.

These experiences mark the end of the third stage of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual life.

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CHAPTER VI

ON THE DIZZY HEIGHTS OF BRAHMAN

I. Sri Ramakrishna's qualifications for the practice of Advaita (non-dualism)—Nature of the Advaitic (non-dualistic) discipline. II. Totapuri, the Advaita *guru* of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramakrishna's receiving *sannyasa* (holy orders)—Sri Ramakrishna's meditation on Brahman, the Absolute—His realization of *nirvikalpa samadhi* or Contentless Consciousness. III. Sri Ramakrishna in *nirvikalpa samadhi* for six months at a stretch.

I

Sri Ramakrishna had so far done *sadhanas* (spiritual disciplines) of which the goal was the Personal God. It remained for him to do the Advaita[1] *sadhana* (non-dualistic disciplines) in which the Brahman of the Vedanta, the Pure Being without form and attributes, the Unitary Consciousness beyond all mentation and ego, the Sat-Chit-Ananda or Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute beyond all relativity—is meditated upon and realized. Such meditation represents the path of *jnana* (knowledge) pure and simple. The previous disciplines which he had gone through with consummate ability and perfect success were an excellent preparation for the practice of Advaita (non-dualism), for they had developed his powers of concentration and meditation to an extraordinary degree. His renunciation of *kamini*

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[1] Translated also as monism or monistic.

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and *kanchana* (lust and lucre) was perfect and complete; of worldly ties he had none. He had an old mother whom he loved dearly and whose feelings he respected. His wife[1] was not a bondage. He was devoid of all evil *samskaras* (latent impressions) and *vasanas* (latent tendencies) which are an obstacle to God-realization, for these, if he had any at all, had been burnt in the fire of austerities done so far; only the divine *samskara* remained, which expressed itself in his communion with God in the aspect of Kali, Shiva, Rama, Krishna. Even among these divine forms, the form which he loved most dearly was that of Kali the Mother, whose permission and guidance he used to seek and obtain whenever he would undertake a new *sadhana* (spiritual discipline). This then was his only *samskara*—love of the Personal God, born of the worship and realization of Kali the Mother.

In the non-dualistic discipline the aspirant adores and meditates on the Absolute beyond word and thought. In the strictly logical sense such meditation is difficult or rather impossible, for how can one meditate on That which is beyond mind? So the process involved is 'being' and 'becoming'. The *sadhaka* (aspirant) himself is Brahman, he has only to remove the veil that hides It from his view—eliminate the consciousness of body, mind and ego until the Pure Consciousness is realized. The non-dualistic discipline is the most difficult of all spiritual practices. The aim is to transcend all mentation and ego-consciousness. The state—if state it can be called—of Contentless Consciousness is then realized.

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[1] She was then only ten years old, but Ramakrishna must have been perfectly conscious of his future duty to her.

II

The year in which Sri Ramakrishna had realized the Love Transcendental, he met a *sannyasin*, Totapuri by name, belonging to the Puri Order of Hindu monks. Totapuri had attained Self-realization and realized the *nirvikalpa samadhi* (Contentless Consciousness) as the result of forty years of spiritual practices. He was struck by the personality of Sri Ramkrishna behind whose plain-looking appearance he discerned great fitness for the practice of Advaita (non-dualism). He asked Sri Ramakrishna whether he was willing to be initiated into *sannyasa* and thus become a monk. This meant that Sri Ramakrishna must give up the insignia of his state of life such as the sacred thread and the tuft of hair which marked him as a *brahmin* and a householder—having a particular role in society—and begin a new life with a purely spiritual and super-social ideal. Sri Ramakrishna said that he had no objection, provided that he could take the vows in private; for he feared that he might shock his old mother, who was then staying at Dakshineswar, by letting her see him shave his head, take the monk's vows, and don the ochre robe. Totapuri understood the difficulty and replied, 'All right, I shall initiate you privately at the proper time.'

On the appointed day Sri Ramakrishna performed the *shraddha* ceremony (the prescribed oblations to the departed manes), for a *sannyasin* can no longer take part in such rites. Then he performed his own *shraddha*, his own death-ceremony, signifying the death of all—body, mind and personality—that made him a separate per-

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son. He went through the ceremony exactly as he was told. He fasted, collected the requisites for performing the *viraja homa*[1] in his meditation room in the Panchavati according to the instuctions of the *guru*, and spent the remaining part of the day and the whole night in the thought of Brahman (the Absolute).

The night was almost over; in the last half-hour, the most auspicious time for his initiation, the teacher and the disciple entered the meditation room. The teacher chanted the holy *mantras* (sacred texts) which the disciple repeated before offering oblations one after another into the sacred fire, renouncing, as he did so, all desire for enjoyment, here and hereafter, and giving assurance of safety to all creatures in recognition of their identity with himself. The tuft of hair and the sacred thread were then burnt, and he accepted from the *guru* the loin-cloth and the ochre robe, emblems of the new life.

This investitute over, Sri Ramakrishna prostrated before the *guru* and took his seat to receive instructions. Totapuri then taught him the cardinal truths of the Advaita Vedanta (non-dualistic philosophy) and tried on the day of *sannyasa* to help his disciple fix his mind firmly on the Absolute.

Sri Ramakrishna himself described what happened in the following words: 'After the initiation my *guru* began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedanta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive into the Atman (Self). But in spite of all my attempts I could not cross

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[1] This is the most vital part of the *sannyasa* ceremony and may be attended only by *sannyasins*.

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the realm of name and form, and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in withdrawing the mind from all objects except one, the all too familiar form of the Blissful Mother—radiant and of the essence of Pure Consciousness—which appeared before me as a living reality preventing me from passing beyond the realm of name and form. Again and again I tried to concentrate my mind upon the teachings of Advaita (non-dualism), but every time the Mother's form stood in my way. In despair I said to the *guru*, "It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with the Atman (Self)." He grew excited and sharply said, "What! You can't do it! But you have to." He cast his eyes round, and, finding a piece of glass, took it up; then, pressing the point between my eyebrows, he said, "Concentrate the mind on this point!" Then with a stern determination I again sat to meditate and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my power of discrimination as a sword and with it severed her form in two. There remained no more obstruction to my mind, which at once soared beyond the relative plane, and I was lost in *samadhi* (superconsciousness)!'

Thus Sri Ramakrishna passed into the unfathomable depths of the *nirvikalpa samadhi* (Contentless Consciousness). The body became motionless like a corpse; the senses and the mind ceased to function; the universe disappeared, and space melted away. Everything was reduced to ideas, which floated like shadows in the dim background of the mind; only the faint consciousness of 'I' repeated itself in dull monotony. Presently that too stopped, and only Existence remained. The soul lost itself in the Self. All idea of duality, of subject and object, was effaced. Sri Ramakrishna realized Brahman (the Absolute).

Totapuri sat for a long time, silently watching his disciple. Finding him perfectly motionless, he quietly left the room and locked the door lest anyone should intrude without his knowledge. He awaited the call from Sri Ramakrishna to open the door. The day passed and the night came. Another day, and still another—three days passed—and yet there was no call. Totapuri was astonished and went to see what was wrong. He opened the door and entered the room: he found his disciple in the same position in which he had left him. There was no manifestation of life in the body, but the countenance was serene and radiant. The disciple was still dead to the objective world. 'Is it really true?' Totapuri asked himself: 'Is it possible that this man has attained in the course of a single day that which took me forty years of strenuous practice to achieve?' He again and again made a searching examination. He determined whether the heart was beating and whether there was the slightest trace of respiration. Again and again he touched the disciple's corpse-like body. He found no sign of life or of objective consciousness. In joyous bewilderment he cried out, 'Great God, it is nothing short of a miracle!' He at once took steps to bring the mind of Sri Ramakrishna to the relative plane. He uttered in a solemn voice, 'Hari Om.'[1] Little by little the disciple became conscious of the external universe.

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[1] Sacred words uttered before and after meditation.

III

After his *guru* had left Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna was determined to remain in a state of absolute identity with Brahman. He accordingly meditated and entered into *nirvikalpa samadhi* again. Referring to this period of his life, he used to say, 'For six months at a stretch I remained in that state whence ordinary men can never return—the body falling off after twenty-one days like a sear leaf. I was not conscious of day and night; flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do in a dead body, but I did not feel them; the hair became matted with accretions of dust. There was no chance for the body to survive, and it would certainly have perished but for the kind ministrations of a monk who was present at Dakshineswar at the time. He realized the state of my mind and also understood that this body must be kept alive at any cost, since it was to be of immense good to the world. He therefore busied himself in preserving this body. He would bring food regularly to me and try in various ways to bring my mind down to the consciousness of the relative world, even by beating me with a stick. As soon as he found me to be a little conscious, he would press some food into my mouth, only a bit of which reached the stomach; and there were days in which all his efforts would be in vain. Six months passed in this way. At last I received the Mother's command, "Remain on the threshold[1] of relative consciousness for the sake of humanity." Then I was laid up with a terrible attack of dysentery; an ex-

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[1] The word used in the Bengali original is *bhavamukha*.

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cruciating pain in the stomach tortured me day and night; it went on for six months. Thus only did the mind gradually come down to a lower level and to consciousness of the body. I became a normal man; but before that at the slightest opportunity the mind would take a transcendental flight and merge in the *nirvikalpa samadhi*.' This experience of Sri Ramakrishna ends the fourth and highest stage of his journey on the uncharted seas of Brahman.

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CHAPTER VII

PRACTISING NON-HINDU FAITHS

I. Sri Ramakrishna verifies the truths of other religions. II. Practice of Islam, vision of Mahommed the Prophet and experience of Allah. III. Vision of Jesus and experience of the truth of Christianity. IV. Sri Ramakrishna on Buddhism. V. Sri Ramakrishna and Jainism. VI. Sri Ramakrishna on the Sikh Gurus.

I

Sri Ramakrishna had by now finished practising all the spiritual disciplines of Hinduism, the religion of his birth, and realized God in the varied aspects taught by its Scriptures. He began by worshipping Kali the Mother with simple and child-like faith, and realized Her; he had practised the Tantras and realized the Divine Mother in the aspects taught by them; he had undergone the disciplines of all the *bhavas* of Vaishnavism and realized the Lord of Love in diverse attitudes; lastly he had undergone the disciplines of Advaita Vedanta and experienced *nirvikalpa samadhi* (Contentless Consciousness), realizing Brahman or the Impersonal Absolute beyond all mentation and all subject-object relationship. He had thus gone through the whole range of Hindu disciplines in the course of twelve years, from his eighteenth year to his thirtieth. He had become a Paramahamsa—a perfected, ever-pure and passion-free soul—who represents the final stage of man's evolution.

His experiences varied from simple dualism to the loftiest non-dualism. He had attained that state in which one does not feel one has anything to gain, or lose.

II

The divine urge in Sri Ramakrishna, which drove him on from one spiritual discipline to another in Hinduism, had not spent itself; it now carried him through yet another spiritual practice. This was that of Islam, the religion of the Prophet of Arabia, professed by millions of people who lived side by side with the millions of Hindus in Bengal. He had traversed the vast and wealthy domain of Hinduism and would now travel outside for a while. He would see for himself in what manner the votaries of Islam realized God, and verify for himself its truths by discipline and experience. It was not idle curiosity that prompted him to do so: he had attained a remarkable catholicity of mind and breadth of vision by the practice and realization of the Advaita—the crowning glory of the Vedanta, the rationale and science of religion and philosophy. This looks upon all paths and all creeds as but different approaches to the one indivisible Brahman, the Absolute, into which the Personal God, however conceived, merges. Advaita regards the followers of all religions, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, as pilgrims, more or less conscious, bound for the Temple of Truth, to which the religions of the world are but so many roads. The flight of Ramakrishna's soul from the pinnacle of Advaita (non-dualism) to Islam was like the flight of a bird from the highest top of a tree to one of its branches.

It was only natural that he should want to verify the truth of the religion of Mahommed the Prophet. How different was it from the procedure of the pervert who would not study, and much less practise, his own religion, but must needs embrace another!

Sri Ramakrishna had not to leave Dakshineswar with its peaceful surroundings and holy atmosphere to practise any of the previous disciplines nor had he to go anywhere else to undertake the disciplines of Islam. In 1866 a person named Govinda Rai, who was a follower of Islam, had come to the place. He was a lover of God, and probably a Sufi—a Muslim sect deeply influenced by Vedanta. Govinda found the garden of Dakshineswar quite congenial to him and took up residence there. Attracted by his great faith and devotion, Sri Ramakrishna received initiation from him, and applied himself with characteristic zeal and thoroughness to the disciplines of Islam. He described the condition of his mind at the time in these words: 'Then I used to repeat the name of Allah, dress myself in the fashion of Muslims, and recite Namaz regularly. All Hindu ideas being wholly banished from the mind, not only did I not salute the Hindu gods and goddesses, but I had no inclination to visit them. After three days I reached the goal of that form of *sadhana*.' He first saw a radiant Person with a long beard and grave appearance, and then his mind, passing through the realization of Brahman with attributes, was finally absorbed in Brahman without attributes. During the period of this discipline he did not step into the precincts of the Kali Temple, but lived in the quarters outside its compound.

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III

Islam was not the only Semitic faith that Sri Ramakrishna practised. In 1874 he realized God through the religion of Jesus Christ.

Sri Ramakrishna's experience of the goal of the Christian religion came about in a strange manner without much struggle on his part. He had been acquainted with a devotee named Sambhu Charan Mallik of Calcutta, who among other Scriptures had studied the Bible. He used to visit a garden near the Dakshineswar Temple, which Sambhu owned, and an intimacy grew up between both, Sambhu looking upon Sri Ramakrishna with the reverence due to a master. Though not Christian himself, Sambhu used to read out the Bible to Sri Ramakrishna who thus came to know about Christ and Christianity. In time the desire to realize the Christian ideal arose in the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. One day he was in the parlour of the garden-house of Jadunath Mallik at Dakshineswar, on the walls of which were many beautiful pictures; one of them portrayed the Madonna with the Divine Child. Sri Ramakrishna was looking at the picture and reflecting on the wonderful life of Jesus, when he felt as though the picture had become alive and that rays of light were emanating from the figures of Mary and Jesus, entering into him and altogether changing his mental outlook. When he realized that his Hindu ideas were being pushed into a corner by this onrush of new ideas, he tried his best to stop it and eagerly prayed to the Divine Mother, 'What is it that Thou art doing to me, Mother?' But his appeal was in vain. His reverence for the Hindu gods and goddesses was swept away by this tidal wave; in their stead a deep regard for Christ and the Christian Church filled his heart. His eyes were opened to the vision of Christian devotees burning incense and candles before the figure of Jesus in the churches and offering Him the eager outpourings of their hearts.

When Sri Ramakrishna returned to the Dakshineswar Temple he was so absorbed in these thoughts that he forgot to visit the Divine Mother in the temple. For three days these thoughts held sway in his mind. On the fourth day as he was walking in the Panchavati, he saw an extraordinary-looking person of serene aspect approaching him with gaze intently fixed on him. He knew at once this person to be a man of foreign extraction: he had beautiful large eyes and though the nose was a little flat, it in no way marred the comeliness of his face. Sri Ramakrishna was charmed and wondered who he might be. Presently the figure drew near, and in the inmost recesses of Sri Ramakrishna dawned the intuition, 'This is the Christ who poured out His heart's blood for the redemption of mankind and suffered agonies for its sake. It is none else than the Master-Yogin Jesus, the embodiment of Love!' The Son of Man embraced Sri Ramakrishna and became merged in him. Sri Ramakrishna lost outward consciousness in *samadhi* (superconsciousness), realizing his union with Brahman with attributes; after some time he came down to the normal plane. He became convinced that Jesus Christ was an Incarnation of God.

Long after, in discussing Christ with his disciples who

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were able to speak English, he asked, 'Well, you have read the Bible. Tell me what it says about the features of Christ. What did he look like?' They answered, 'We have not seen this particularly mentioned anywhere in the Bible; but Jesus was born among the Jews, so he must have been fair, with large eyes and an aquiline nose.' Sri Ramakrishna only remarked, 'But I saw his nose was a little flat—who knows why!' Not attaching much importance to these words at the time, the disciples, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, heard that there were three extant descriptions of Christ's features, and one of these actually described him as flat-nosed!

IV

Sri Ramakrishna looked upon the Buddha as an Incarnation of God, thus sharing the general notion of the Hindus regarding that Teacher. He used to offer him his sincere devotion and worship, and believed that it was the Lord Buddha's personality that was still worshipped in the holy triad at the Temple of Jagannath.[1] On a certain occasion he remarked ,'There is not the least doubt about the Lord Buddha's being an Incarnation. There is no difference between his doctrines and those of the Vedic *jnanakanda*.'[2] When told that the Buddha was called an atheist, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Why atheist? He was no atheist—only he could not speak out his realizations. Do you know what "Buddha" means? To become one with "Bodha", the Supreme In-

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[1] At Puri, Orissa.

[2] The *jnanakanda* is that portion of the Veda which relates to the knowledge of one Spirit.

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telligence, through deep meditation, to become Pure Intelligence Itself.'[1] Sri Ramakrishna also observed, 'Being and non-being are modifications of Prakriti. The Reality transcends them both.'

V

Sri Ramakrishna had great reverence for the Tirthankaras, who founded Jainism. In his room at Dakshineswar there was a small statue of Tirthankara Mahavira, before which incense was burnt morning and evening. But he was never heard to speak of the Tirthankaras as Incarnations of God.

VI

Of the Sikh Gurus Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'They are all incarnations of the saintly King Janaka. I have heard it said by the Sikhs that just before attaining liberation he was possessed with the idea of doing good to the world. He was therefore born successively as the ten Gurus of the Sikhs, and after founding the Sikh religion was united for ever with the Supreme Brahman. There is no reason to disbelieve this.'[2]

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, pp. 940–41.

[2] Wherever the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna have been described in his own words in this or any of the preceding chapters, the versions given in *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master* by Swami Saradananda (published by Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 4), or in *Life of Ramakrishna* (published by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora Dt., Himalayas), or in other books of the Ramakrishna Literature, have been followed to ensure accuracy.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE RANGE OF HIS EXPERIENCE

I. Sri Ramakrishna's interpretation of experience and philosophy. II. Evolution of thought in the six systems of Indian philosophy. III. Interpretation of Scriptures based on experience. IV. The Advaita and its conception of God, soul and the universe. V. Tantrik and Vishishtadvaita systems and their conceptions of God, soul and universe. VI. Sri Ramakrishna's great teaching: the Harmony of Religions—The period of his creative activity—The ideals and activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

I

With the closing of the period of Sri Ramakrishna's *sadhana* (spiritual austerities) began the illuminative period of his life. If the most remarkable feature of the purificatory stage of his life was the inexhaustible capacity for spiritual disciplines and insatiable thirst for God in His multifarious aspects, the striking characteristic of the illuminative period was his sure grasp of philosophic and spiritual thought, the result of his having run up and down the gamut of spiritual experience. He was not a scholar; he had no book-learning. He was, however, a practical philosopher who had received light and guidance from the Divine. His realization of the truths of spiritual life, which he had attained as a result of the various *sadhanas* of different Hindu sects and of other religions, enabled Sri Ramakrishna not only to reach the very fountain-head of the schools of philosophy, but also to see for himself the streams of wisdom rising from the divine Source and flowing in different directions: not only was he able to experience the truths of the various schools of thought, but he was also able to synthesize them all into one magnificent harmony. His numerous spiritual practices and experiences gave him immeasurable power far exceeding that of the studious philosopher who is devoid of spiritual striving and realization, loses himself in the structure of his favourite system of thought, and fails to obtain even an intellectual vision of the synthetic whole.

II

Philosophical systems differ according to the standpoint from which the intellect of man views the Truth and the measure in which Truth is intuited.

For purposes of metaphysical discussions, the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy may be grouped into three, namely, (1) Nyaya-Vaisheshika, (2) Sankhya-Yoga, and (3) Vedanta. The systems are called *darshanas* in India, meaning 'means of seeing'. What is to be seen is the Truth or Reality.

The six systems are really one vast and elaborate system containing the three principal presentations of Indian thought suited to differing types and grades of mind; they mark three stages of advance towards comprehension of the Reality 'seen' or experienced by the Vedic *rishis*. Shiva declares: 'The Six Doctrines are My six limbs. He who separates them one from another severs my limbs.'[1] Shiva is Chit, the all-knowing

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[1] *Kularnava Tantra*, ii. 84.

Supreme Consciousness, and *antahkarana* (mind in its totality) is a mode of it. In the words of Sir John Woodroffe, 'The Six Philosophies are the Six Ways in which intellectual approach is made to that Full or Whole Experience (Purna), a state which transcends mind and its operations.'[1] The six systems, therefore, are not entirely isolated and mutually contradictory, but are a graduated series in which the three groups form three great standards suited to different temperaments and minds in different stages of evolution. One may follow any system according to one's *adhikara* (competency), until the mind is trained and prepared for the next higher stage, ultimately becoming fit to realize the Supreme Reality.

There is a progressive advance made towards unity or the one Reality, from the lower stage to the higher, by reducing the number of realities into which the universe is resolved. The Nyaya-Vaisheshika resolves the world into nine realities—two on the subjective side, namely Self or Atman (of which consciousness is an inhering property) and mind, and seven on the objective side, namely the four ultimate constituents of all things in the sensible world, corresponding to the four senses of odour, flavour, visual form and touch, and, in addition, *akasha* (ether), *kala* (time) and *dik* (space). In the second stage of Sankhya-Yoga the number of realities is reduced from nine to two, namely, Purusha or Consciousness and Prakriti or Matter. The third stage which is embodied in the Vedanta opens by discussing whether the two realities of the Sankhya-Yoga cannot be reduced to one. Now subject and object, spirit and matter, can be unified only in something which transcends them both: Supreme Unitary Experience can be had only when the consciousness is divested of all those limitations without which the sensible universe cannot exist.

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[1] *The World as Power: Reality.*

III

Spiritual experience varies. It may be more or less dualistic, or, for so long as it endures, non-dualistic. The great commentators of Hinduism interpreted the Scriptures in the light of their individual spiritual experiences. Different interpretations arose according to the range and depth of the experience. It is obvious that they are all bound to differ in details. But they differ also in the most vital points—in the conception and nature of the Reality. Thus the great Vedic utterance, '*Tattvamasi* (That thou art),'[1] has been interpreted in a variety of ways by different schools. Both Shankara and Ramanuja take *tat* in the nominative, meaning 'That'. Of these two commentators, Shankara interprets the saying 'That thou art'.[2] As expressing the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul, whereas Ramanuja interprets it thus: 'Thou and That are in the relation of body and soul.'[3] Now *tat* may also stand for any case except the accusative; thus *tat* may stand for *tasmai*, *tasmat*, *tasya*, *tasmin*, and *tena*.[4] Madhva takes *tat* to mean *tasya*—'Thou art His,' 'He is Thy Lord; thou belongest to Him and dependest on Him.'[1] Vallabha takes *tat* to mean *tasmat*—'That from which all proceeds.'[2] Dvaitavadins (dualistic teachers) and *bhaktas* (devotees) take *tat* to mean *tasmin*—'In Him thou livest and with Him thou must unite through devotion'—or *tasmai*—'For Him thou art produced and of Him thou must work being in His service'—or *tena*—'By Him thou art supported.' *Tat* is also taken to mean *atat* ('not That') by some dualists, for *sa atmatattvamasi* in the original context in which the saying occurs may be split as *sa atma atattvamasi*—meaning 'That thou art not.'

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[1] *Chhandogya Upanishad*, VI. viii. 7.

[2] See Shankara's Commentary on the text.

[3] See *Sri Bhashya*, Anandamayadhikarana, para. 48, in Rama Misra Sastri's edn., or English translation by Rangacharya and Varadaraja.

[4] Appayya Dikshita mentions only *tasmai*, *tasmat*, *tasya* and *tasmin* besides the nominative. See *Brahmasutra Shankarabhashya, Bhamati Kalpataru Parimala*, edited by N. S. Anantakrishna Sastri. Madhusudana Saraswati's *Advaitasiddhi* mentions *tena* also; see *Tattvamasyadivakyartha Nirupana*, ii., in N. S. Anantakrishna Sastri's edn.

If there is such a variety of interpretations of a Vedic saying regarding the relationship between the soul of man and God, not less striking is the variety of conceptions of the relation of the universe to its Maker. In all the systems except that of Advaita, the universe is real, but the Principle of which it is a manifestation is not independent and self-subsisting, but dependent on God as the *ens realissimum* of the universe. Nimbarka who preached Bheda-abheda-vada (doctrine of difference and non-difference) holds that this Principle is different from the Lord as the possibility of distinct and dependent existence (*paratantra-sattabhava*), and yet not different as impossibility of independent existence (*swatantra-sattabhava*).[3] Ramanuja, the great exponent of Vishisht-advaita (qualified non-dualism), looks upon the universe as the body of the Lord, and the Lord as the soul of the universe (*sharira-shariri-sambandha*). Madhva, the

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[1] See *Nyayasudha*, Jijnasadhikarana.

[2] See *Tattvartha Dipa Nibandha*.

[3] See *Vedanta-Parijata-Saurabha*, comments on *Vedanta-Sutras*, III. ii. 22, 27; Cf. III. ii. 11, 28; and II. iii. 42-4.

Dvaita (dualistic) teacher, holds that the universe is within His Lordship (*swamitwa-sambandha*), the three entities in his system being Niyamaka (the Supreme), *bhoktri* (the enjoyer) and *bhogya* (the objects of enjoyment).[1] Vallabha, an advocate of Brahmavada or Shuddhadvaita (pure non-dualism), holds that the universe is one with the Lord, being a part of Him as it were—'a spark thrown out by fire'.[2]

All the above different interpretations are true, just as the different spiritual experiences which support them and to which they point are true. Each interpretation, like each experience, has the truth of its stage. The commentaries represent differing levels of intellectual comprehension, and correspond to differing levels of experience. Since man progresses from truth to truth, merging the lower truth into a higher truth, we can very well say that there are lower levels and higher levels of experience. It is also obvious that the higher the experience, the more comprehensive is the unity realized. The movement towards unity is seen as one progresses from Nyaya-Vaisheshika through Sankhya-Yoga to Vedanta, beginning with dualism and ending with non-dualism.

Where does the movement towards greater and greater unity end? The answer is given by Vedanta in its non-dualistic aspect.

IV

All the schools of Vedanta take up the analysis of philosophic thought at the point at which it was left

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[1] Cf. *Purnaprajnadarshana*, II. i. 15–20ff.

[2] *Tattvartha Dipa Nibandha*, i. 28.

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by the previous stage, represented by the Sankhya-Yoga. As already pointed out, the Vedanta schools hold that one of the two realities of the Sankhya-Yoga, that is to say, Prakriti (Primal Matter), is not wholly independent of the other, Purusha or Formless Consciousness. These schools deny the reality of a completely independent world, asserted in the Sankhya-Yoga. With the exception of Advaita (non-dualism), they give the world a relative reality. That of which the world is a part, or with which it is connected, is the Absolute Reality.

According to non-dualism, however, the reality of the universe is empirical only, and it becomes stultified or negated on the transcendental plane. From its transcendental height Advaita (non-dualism) thus reduces the two realities of Sankhya-Yoga to one, whereas the other Vedantic schools look upon one of the realities as an adjunct of the other.

According to the ancient seers,[1] there are four states of consciousness, namely, waking, dream, deep dreamless sleep and the superconscious, which last they called *turiya* or the fourth state.[2] They discovered that consciousness is the indispensable condition of all objective reality, and therefore found the clue to the nature of the Ultimate Reality in a study and analysis of the whole range of consciousness.

In the waking state we see the gross material universe, in the dream state a subtle, attenuated inner universe, and in the dreamless sleep state, an undifferentiated

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[1] See *Mandukya Upanishad.*

[2] The *turiya* is often translated and understood as the fourth state, but it is not strictly a state at all. It is identical with Existence Itself, and it is this that appears as the three states.

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unified whole. In the waking and dream states consciousness works through what have been called nineteen gateways—the five organs of action, the five organs of knowledge, the five *pranas*, and the *antahkarana* (the internal instrument) consisting of *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (determinative faculty), *ahamkara* (egoism) and *chitta* (mind-stuff). In the dreamless sleep state the mind and the senses do not function, and *chetas* (intelligence or consciousness itself) comprehends the objective without their instrumentality. From this difference between the waking and dream states on the one hand and the dreamless sleep state on the other, the ancient seers argued that the differentiation or diversity of the phenomenal world, which is perceived differently in both the waking and dream states and unperceived in the dreamless sleep state, must be due to the interposition of mind. The mind then acts like a prism refracting the rays of the light of consciousness in the waking and dream states.

The ancient seers also observed that the objective has no permanent attribute: it is changed and modified in the different states of consciousness. But consciousness is the background of all the three states. It eternally *is*. It exists even in sleep, and that is why we are able to remember that we slept well. Every act of remembrance is but an act of recognition, and our remembering the fact of our sleep only shows that the cognizer was awake in sleep as well.

Whereas consciousness is eternal, the objective becomes attenuated and subtle in dream, and tends to merge more and more into the subject until it is almost completely merged in dreamless sleep. In that state there is only a thin veil over the objective, a feeble sense of the differentiation between the subject and the object, thus pointing to the possibility of the complete merging of the object into the subject. Next comes the question, Does the object completely merge into the subject at any time? The answer given by the seers is that it does wholly merge when consciousness becomes perfectly contentless, as in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, and in that state of superconsciousness absolute unity is realized.[1]

V

A discussion, however brief or cursory, of Indian philosophy would be incomplete without a reference to the philosophy of the Agamas. This philosophy is three-fold, namely Shakta Agama, Shaiva Agama and Vaishnava Agama. They have much in common. We shall briefly consider one of them—the Shakta or Tantrik philosophy.

In the Tantrik philosophy the place of the *purushas* (souls) of the Sankhya—which are supposed to be infinite and yet separate—is taken by one Siva, and that of Prakriti by the Shakti or Power of Shiva. Shiva and Shiva's Power, however, are not separate independent realities, but one and the same Reality in two aspects, namely, potential and kinetic. It is a fundamental Tantrik doctrine that there is no Shiva without Shakti and no Shakti without Shiva. The one Reality as the changeless actionless consciousness is called Shiva; the same Reality as the active power of actionless consciousness is called Shakti. The universe is the product of Chit-Shakti and Maya-Shakti—that is Chit or consciousness

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[1] *Mundaka Upanishad*, III. ii. 17.

conceived as power and efficient cause, and Maya-Shakti as power and material cause. Chit-Shakti, like Purusha of the Sankhya, is the efficient cause, and yet the actionless witness of all that goes on: Maya-Shakti, like Prakriti of the Sankhyas, is the ultimate Substance-Energy out of and through which the universe is evolved.

This form of Tantrik philosophy, often called Tantrik Advaita, is similar to Advaita Vedanta, since it reduces the two realities of Sankhya-Yoga to one. Advaita views the experience of the universe from the transcendental standpoint—from the standpoint of the one ultimate Reality—and sees the universe as false: the universe is only granted an empirical reality for conventional and practical purposes. The Tantra views the experience of the universe from the standpoint of the universe itself, and considers that its myriad forms are in their essence the enduring Real, that is, Shakti (Divine Mother); and that the objects of experience, though passing, yet have a reality, in that they are forms of Herself. There is thus a real, yet transient, diversity in a real and enduring unity. Advaita states that forms are only relatively real, grounded on the substratum of one Reality, and are due to the inscrutable Power of the Personal God, called Maya: that power, which is an attribute, neither is nor can be an integral part of Brahman or the Absolute. In the Tantras, Brahman as Power is the cause of the universe. As this power is real, so is the universe which is its effect. Thus the Tantrik affirms, 'I am real as Body,' for Matter is a form of the Divine Power or Shakti. 'I am real as Mind,' for Mind is another form of the same Power. Again, 'I am real as the Unchanging Consciousness clothed in mind and body, and transcending them.'

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The forms come and go, re-entering and re-issuing from the Paramartha or the Supreme Reality. Hence the Shakta says, 'Sa'ham (She I am).' When speaking of the Kutastha Shiva or enduring Real, he also says. 'So'ham (He I am),' 'Shivo'ham (Shiva I am).'

Shankaracharya, from the transcendental standpoint, views the world as false, but to the Shakta, and from his standpoint, it is real. It is the field of action and liberation.[1] To him Maya is not unreal (*avasthu*). It is not a mere mist of ignorance which is connected and yet unconnected, with Brahman, and which screens the Reality. It is an eternal Reality or Power appearing as the passing and changing worlds. It is the Divine Mother who is the Power. The Shakta says the worlds are breathed out and breathed in; or he describes the Divine Power[2] as the Cosmic Heart, whose diastole is the evolution of everything that is not Pure Consciousness, and whose systole is the involution of the same. Thus there is something of the Absolute Reality even in this illusory world, which is nothing but the names and forms of the Divine Mother. Hence it is that the Shakta says of himself, not only with regard to spirit but also with regard to mind and body, 'Sa'ham (She I am),' 'I am the real and the power of the real.'

The Shakta says, 'Better accept the reality of the changing world and also of the changeless.' Shiva teaches, 'Some desire dualism, others non-dualism. Such, however, know not My Truth which is neither non-dualism nor dualism.'[3]

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[1] The *Kularnava Tantra* says: '*Mokshayate samsara.*'

[2] See Sir John Woodroffe, *The World as Power: Reality.*

[3] *Kularnava Tantra*, i. 110.

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It may also be mentioned in passing that the Tantras are similar to Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) of Sri Ramanuja, but yet there is a difference. For, according to Ramanuja, mind and matter not merely seem to be, but actually form, the body of the Lord, and are distinct from Him (the Ultimate Reality being considered the Soul of the Lord); whilst the Tantras hold that the world is the body of the Lord so long as it lasts, but ultimately there is only the one Atman into which mind and matter merge.

VI

It was the great glory of Sri Ramakrishna that he was able not only to attain the different realizations which are at the back of the different systems of philosophy and the different sects of worship, but also to reconcile them in a practical manner. Such a synthesis is a living reality, and is not merely a theory appealing only to the intellect. Nay, more, his realizations of the truths of Islam, Christianity and other religions besides Hinduism, which confer on him a unique place among the mystics of the world, enabled him to preach a universal synthesis of the spiritual thought and culture, ideals and aspirations of humanity. His firm grasp of the fruit, experience and philosophy, enabled him to squeeze out the juice, a great teaching—the Harmony of Religions. In the nineteenth century the world saw a mystic without parallel, for his spiritual experience ranged from that of Chaitanya to that of Shankara, the approaches to whose realizations are poles apart. His ocean-heart was the receptacle of spiritual currents moving in and coming from opposite directions. In it met varied truths, as in the Divine Heart Itself to which they belong.

Sri Ramakrishna was destined to deliver a message to humanity. His message is the message of the reality of the Self like that of other saints and sages, but his priceless contribution to the world of religious thought is the message of the Harmony of Religions. Like the highest mystics of East and West, he imparted his teachings to his chosen disciples, moulded their lives and so trained them that they might bear aloft the banner that he had handed over to them. It was this message that his great spiritual aide, Swami Vivekananda, preached in India and abroad, after the Master's passing away. It is the spirit of Ramakrishna that dwells in the twin organizations of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, which hold aloft the great ideals of Self-realization and Service of humanity. They carry on their labour of love in India and abroad for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of men, women and children, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, looking upon them as veritable manifestations of the Divine. It is Ramakrishna's vision of the Divine in man that forms at once the motive power and the goal, the inspiration and the consummation, of the work of spiritual ministration as well as of the various humanitarian services, done in his name, to the poor and the needy, the helpless and the illiterate, the destitute and the diseased. Such activities as the teaching and training of disciples, as well as the imparting of instructions to all those who sought his advice belong to what we may call the communicative and creative period (1879–86) of his life. To this period also belongs his great and unique message of the Harmony of Religions.

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CHAPTER IX

HARMONY IN INDIAN THOUGHT

I. The partisan, eclectic and synthetic methods of the study of religion. II. The partisan, eclectic and synthetic outlooks in ancient India. III. Synthesis and harmony in the spiritual thought of ancient and mediaeval India. IV. Synthesis and harmony in modern Indian thought and the place of Sri Ramakrishna.

I

Though the ancient Aryans were not faced with a war of religions as we know it today, they were the true founders of comparative religion and philosophy. Centuries before the modern era with its conflict of religions and sects, they compared the different systems of worship that arose in the country, like the worship of Indra, Mitra, Varuna and other gods. They also compared the various doctrines, especially the doctrines of *karma* (action) and *jnana* (meditation), the one enjoining on man the performance of rituals and ceremonials according to the *karmakanda* (ritualistic portion) of the Vedas, the other preaching the life of peace and contemplation in the solitude of the forest.

As a result of wide comparison, the ancient Aryans discovered that religion and philosophy may be studied from any one of three standpoints, namely the partisan,[1] the eclectic[2] and the synthetic.[3] According to the first of these standpoints, the votary believes only in his

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[1] *Siddhanta.* [2] *Samuchchaya.* [3] *Samanvaya.*

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own religion or path, and does not accept the truth of another. This often leads him to a faith that is characterized by depth and intensity, but lacks width and charity. In normal times the narrowness and crudity of his conceptions of religions and sects other than his own may not become manifest. Most men may be said to be partisan in this respect. They study their own religion and practise it; they are honest and sincere. So far so good. But the conviction that their religion and sect is the only path to salvation and that other faiths are heretical, inadequate and unsuitable, carries with it potential dissension which may break out at the slightest friction, resulting at times in fierce fanaticism and blind bigotry.

Secondly there is the eclectic standpoint. The danger of narrowness is avoided in the eclectic view. The eclectic studies and appreciates the teachings of all religions, and is ready to accept the precepts of any religion that have a spiritual value. Nay, he is ready to garland them together like flowers of the garden for the benefit of humanity. He is far more broad-minded and generous than the partisan.

The eclectic, however, has to face two difficulties. The first is felt when he tries to choose a suitable spiritual discipline for his own spiritual practice. He can seek it either under his own religion or sect, or under another. Though numerous systems of spiritual practices have been taught by the different religions of the world, his birth, traditions and environment have produced in him certain impressions or innate spiritual tendencies (*samskaras*), which naturally draw him to the disciplines of his own religion or sect. Through them his spiritual

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nature can grow more easily and develop more rapidly. To reject them and choose the practices of any other religion would mean spiritual stagnation and even spiritual suicide in most cases. Eclecticism usually leads to a superficial cosmopolitanism, devoid of strength and intensity.

The eclectic also experiences a second difficulty: when he takes different elements from different religions that appeal to him and puts them together, excluding those elements that are not to his personal liking, he tends to form a new sect with a scripture of his own making, thus adding to the already existing sects and scriptures of the world, and giving his sect and scripture the stamp of his own individuality. Such an anthology, bringing out the valuable truths and teachings of many religions, is welcome in comparative study, but cannot take the place of a scripture proper. For every scripture contains specific methods of spiritual discipline and a definite system of philosophic thought in more or less developed form, and, besides, derives its sanction from the spiritual realizations of some great Teacher or Prophet. These form the bed-rock upon which its authority rests.

Thirdly, we have the standpoint of synthesis or harmony of religions, which has supplanted eclecticism. It combines the ardour and intensity of the individualist with the depth and generosity of the eclectic. It affirms that all religions are true, they being paths to the same goal of God-consciousness. It recognizes that diversity is a law of nature, and that therefore various religions with various sects are bound to exist under the present conditions of humanity. Its aim is to see unity in this diversity, and not to attempt to effect uniformity through standardization.

Such a synthesis, resulting in the harmony of the various conflicting creeds and paths, was the outcome not merely of the spirit of enquiry that animated the ancient Aryan mind, but also of the capacity for generalization that had its origin in a recognition and realization of unity. What made the ancient Aryans greater than any other race in the world was the blending of the gifts of acute intelligence and warm emotion with that of intuitive self-knowledge—the gift of the gods. It was this divine faculty that gave them the power to brush aside particulars and arrive at generalizations, to penetrate the cloud of facts and ideas, and reach the sunshine, without which nothing would be visible.

II

All the three types of religious and philosophical outlook—the partisan, eclectic and synthetic—have been known in India from very ancient times. In the days of the *Rig-Veda* the devotee exclusively chose some *devata* or deity as his Ideal, and in this manner worshipped Indra, Mitra, Varuna or some other god. Some votaries worshipped one deity after another, looking upon each for the time being as the Supreme Deity, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. This system of worship was characterized by Max Müller as kathenotheism,[1] that is 'the worship of one god after another', or henotheism,[2] 'the worship of single gods'. The worship that was prevalent was that of Brahman or the Supreme Spirit, manifest in some deity or other. Such worship was quite common among the Hindus, and they perform it even today with an ease and freedom which comes of their conviction that every deity or Chosen Ideal is a manifestation of Brahman.

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[1] Max Müller, *What India Can Teach Us.*

[2] Ibid.

It is well known that the men of the Vedic period followed either the ritualistic portion (*karmakanda*) of the Vedas or the knowledge portion (*jnanakanda*). After a time there were others who followed these paths conjointly and advocated the combination of ritualism with knowledge. Thus came into existence *jnana-karma-samuchchaya* (combination of knowledge with work). In a similar manner there also came into existence *jnana-bhakti-samuchchaya* (combination of knowledge with devotion), *bhakti-karma-samuchchaya* (combination of devotion with action), and so on, according to the temperamental needs and spiritual necessities of men. Such schools of thought became the bone of contention of later scholars and spiritual aspirants.

III

It is one of the brightest and most refreshing features of the history of Hindu thought that even as early as the days of the *Rig-Veda*, a *rishi* proclaimed, 'Truth is One, sages call It variously—they call It Agni, Yama, Matarishwan.'[1] Another *rishi* sang, 'The wise ones describe Him who is one with beautiful wings, in many ways.'[2] Vedic seers like Yajnavalkya and Dirghatamas

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[1] *Rig-Veda*, I. clxiv. 46.

[2] Ibid., x. cxiv. 5.

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also preached the synthetic point of view and harmonized the various paths of worship and schools of thought.

The most outstanding personality to preach a synthesis in the post-Vedic period was Sri Krishna, the Divine author of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. He appeared at a time when there was widespread conflict in the Hindu fold—conflict between *karma* (action), *jnana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion) and *yoga* (concentration), which form the main paths or spiritual disciplines (*sadhana-margas*) of Hinduism; conflict between the duties of the various *varnas* (castes) and *ashramas* (stages of life); and conflict between the rights and privileges of the higher and lower sections of society. He had therefore to face a religious and philosophical as well as a social conflict. His teachings, given in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, form the most magnificent and comprehensive synthesis of spiritual thought and life known to man in the whole range of religious literature. He harmonized all the paths and all the creeds; he harmonized all the conflicting systems of philosophy; he harmonized the duties of the *varnas* and *ashramas*; he also broadcasted afar the treasures of spiritual thought and wisdom enshrined in the Vedic religion to one and all, and removed the prohibition of the study of the Scriptures and practice of spiritual disciplines by women, Vaishyas and Shudras as well as 'those of sinful birth',[1] that evidently existed in his time.

Centuries after Sri Krishna, sectarianism reasserted itself. The synthetic character of Hindu thought was almost forgotten when the ritualism of the Agamas—the

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[1] *Bhagavad-Gita*, ix. 32.

Shaiva Agama, the Shakta Agama, and the Vaishnava Agama or Pancharatra—became over-elaborate, and the six philosophies—Nyaya and Vaisheshika, Sankhya and Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Vedanta—all dealing with Reality and interpreting the Scriptures in different ways, became degraded into systems of hair-splitting. To this conflict between the various schools of Agamas with their respective Chosen Ideals or Ishta Devatas, and the conflict between the various systems of philosophy, were added in the Shankarite and post-Shankarite periods the conflicts between the three well-known schools of Vedanta (the Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita), expounding the Truth in different ways. But out of the din and turmoil, there slowly emerged in time the voice of peace through synthesis and harmony: for the various Ishta Devatas (Chosen Ideals) of the Tantras came to be looked upon as manifestations of the one supreme Brahman; the six systems of philosophy were taken as studies of the one Reality from various point of view; and the three schools of Vedanta were treated as so many views of God in His personal and impersonal aspects, differing because seen from different levels of spiritual attainment.

When Sri Ramachandra asked Hanuman in what way he regarded Him and meditated on Him, Hanuman replied: 'O Rama, at times I worship Thee as Purna, the One undivided. Then I look upon myself as *amsha*, a part, a fragment, as it were, of that Divinity. At other times I meditate upon Thee as my divine Master, and think of myself as Thy servant only.' The same genuine catholicity arising from the synthetic outlook, characterizes also the *Shivamahimnastotra* which says: 'The Vedas, Sankhya, Yoga, Pashupata and Vaishnava creeds are each encouraged in one place or another. Some think that this or that is better, owing to differences of taste, but all men reach You, the Supreme, as all rivers, straight or crooked, reach the sea.' A well-known Hindu hymn says, 'May Hari, the Ruler of the three worlds, worshipped by the Shaivites as Shiva, by the Vedantins as Brahman, by the Buddhists as the Buddha, by the followers of Nyaya as the Chief Agent, by the Jains as the Liberated, and by the Karmakandins as the Principle of Law, grant our prayers.' As Madhusudana Saraswati puts it, 'In reality, all the *munis* who have put forward these theories agree in wishing to prove the existence of the One Supreme Lord without a second. . . . These *munis* cannot be in error, considering that they are omniscient: and these different views have only been propounded by them in order to keep off all nihilistic theories, and because they were afraid that human beings, with their inclinations towards the objects of the world, cannot be expected at once to know the true goal of man.'[1] It is no wonder, therefore, that at the conclusion of his morning and evening prayers, the Hindu boy utters these words: 'All adoration leads to God, just as all water that descends from the heavens wends its way to the sea.'

IV

In later times we come across the shining utterances of two great teachers of synthesis and harmony—Guru Nanak and Kabir. The nineteenth century brings into view the ideal of Raja Ram Mohan Roy—the first great citizen of Modern India, who advocated the adoration of the One Universal Spirit—and Keshab Chandra Sen.

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[1] Madhusudana Saraswati, *Prasthanabheda.*

The latest and greatest of these synthesists was Sri Ramakrishna. Only he can be compared to Sri Krishna, the divine author of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Ramakrishna is the supreme reconciler of religions, the outstanding teacher of synthesis and harmony, who reminds us of Sri Krishna. Krishna reconciled the clashing schools and sects and paths of Hinduism at his time: Ramakrishna reconciled the religions and schools, sects and paths of the modern world.

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CHAPTER X

THE SEVENFOLD HARMONY

I. Akbar's glorious dream—Sri Ramakrishna, a living Parliament of Religions—The sevenfold harmony taught by him. II. The Harmony of Religions. III. Harmony of systems of philosophy. IV. Harmony of the paths of spiritual disciplines. V. Harmony of the personal and impersonal aspects of God. VI. Harmony of types of superconsciousness. VII. Harmony of the sects and denominations upholding different Ishta Devatas. VIII. Harmony of the duties of the various classes and of individuals in different stages of life.

I

It was given to India to produce Akbar, who dreamt of the Harmony of Religions, and attempted to realize the dream by convening a Parliament of Religions at Agra more than three hundred and fifty years ago. Again it was India that produced, in the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna, who was the veritable embodiment of the Harmony of Religions. Whereas Akbar attempted his glorious task by studying the great religions of India with the help of their accredited representatives, Sri Ramakrishna solved the problem by *living* them.

The varied spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna enabled him to proclaim the grand doctrine of the Harmony of Religions, which is sevenfold in character: (1) the harmony between religion and religion; (2) the harmony between philosophy and philosophy; (3) the harmony between the various paths of spiritual disciplines; (4) the harmony between the personal and impersonal aspects of God; (5) the harmony between the different types of superconsciousness, which are the goals of different forms of spiritual disciplines; (6) the harmony between sects and denominations within the same religion; and (7) the harmony between the duties of men belonging to different *varnas* and *ashramas* (divisions of society and stages of life).

II

The first and foremost phase of the harmony or synthesis taught by Sri Ramakrishna is the fellowship of faiths, or concord of creeds. He taught that all religions are true, they being simply different paths to the same goal of superconsciousness. 'Different creeds', said Sri Ramakrishna, 'are but different paths to reach the one God. Diverse are the ways that lead to the temple of Mother Kali at Kalighat.[1] Similarly, various are the ways that lead to the house of the Lord. Every religion is nothing but one of these paths.'[2] Again, 'As one can ascend the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo, a staircase or a rope, so also, diverse are the ways of approaching God. Every religion in the world shows one of these ways.'[3]

Sri Ramakrishna taught that all the Prophets or Founders of religions have received their strength and guidance from one and the same divine Source: 'The light of the gas-lamp illumines various localities with varying intensity, but the sustenance of light, which is the gas, comes from one common source. Similarly, the religious teachers of all lands and of all ages are but so many lamps through which the light of the Spirit streams constantly from the one almighty Source.'[1] He also believed that all Teachers and Prophets teach essentially the same truths: 'The Avatara (Incarnation) is always one and the same. Plunging into the ocean of life, He rises up in one place and is known as Krishna; diving again and rising elsewhere, He is known as Christ.'[2] 'On the tree of Sachchidananda grow innumerable fruits such as Rama, Krishna, Christ and others: one or two of them come down now and then to this world, and they work wonderful changes in society.'[3] Sri Ramakrishna believed in the Divine Incarnation as a fact. He said, 'The Avatara or Saviour is a human messenger of God. He is like the viceroy of a mighty monarch. As when there is any disturbance in a far-off province, the king sends his viceroy to quell it, so whenever there is prevalence of irreligion in any part of the world, God sends His Avatara for its destruction.'[4]

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[1] Near Calcutta.

[2] *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (10th edn., 1965), Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 4, 464.

[3] Ibid., 467.

Sri Ramakrishna observed: 'A common man through ignorance considers his own religion to be the best and makes much useless clamour; but when his mind is illumined by true knowledge, all sectarian quarrel disappears.'[5] It is such ignorance that makes a man blindly believe the doctrines and dogmas of his religion, and that breeds fanaticism which argues a lack of understanding of religions other than his own and a want of earnestness in the practice of his own religion. Ramakrishna condemned such bigotry: 'When the grace of the Almighty descends, everyone will understand his mistakes. Knowing this you should not dispute.'[1] 'Be not like the frog in the well. It knows nothing bigger and grander than its well. So are all bigots; they do not see anything better than their own creeds.'[2] What then should be the attitude of a truly religious man towards the religions to which he does not belong? Says Sri Ramakrishna, 'A truly religious man should think that other religions also are paths leading to Truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.'[3] 'Remain always strong and steadfast in your own faith, but eschew all bigotry and intolerance.'[4] He used to say: '*Dala* (sedge) does not grow in large pure-water tanks, but in small stagnant and miasmatic pools. Similarly *dala* (clique) does not form in a party whose adherents are guided by pure, broad and unselfish motives, but it takes firm root in a party whose members are given to selfishness, insincerity and bigotry.'[5]

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[1] Ibid., 468.

[2] *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* (6th impression), Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, 1967, 126.

[3] Ibid., 127.

[4] Ibid., 129.

[5] Ibid., 698.

Sri Ramakrishna used to liken the various forms of worship to varieties of foods. While discussing this with a disciple he observed on a certain occasion: 'You were talking of images made of clay. There is a necessity for them too. These various forms of worship have been provided to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.' Continuing he said, 'The mother so arranges the food for her children that each one gets what agrees with him. If she has five children and she gets a big fish to cook, she makes different dishes out of it and gives each one of them what suits him exactly. One is given rich pilao with fish, another of weak digestion only a little soup, others again exactly what agrees with them.'[1]

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[1] Ibid., 681

[2] Ibid., 682.

[3] *Sayings*, 483.

[4] *Teachings*, 684.

[5] Ibid., 680. There is a pun on the word *dala*.

Sri Ramakrishna also taught that the ways to attain superconsciousness are to be found in what may be called the positive part of every religion. There is also a negative part which speaks of punishment and damnation, eternal or otherwise, for the straggler from the path laid down; but there is not any truth in the negative part, which has been added to the positive part in order to prevent the members of the fold from deserting it and straying into other folds.[2]

III

Sri Ramakrishna also reconciled the different systems of philosophy by reconciling the varied spiritual experiences which form their inspiration and basis. He taught that man usually begins his spiritual life with dualistic (Dvaita) disciplines—the idea that there is a qualitative as well as a quantitative difference between his own self and God. When he progresses in his path, he experiences the truth of qualified non-dualism (Vishisht-

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[1] *Sayings*, 326–27.

[2] Swami Saradananda, *Stray Thoughts on the Literature and Religion of India*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras: last chapter.

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advaita)—that God is the whole and he is a part of Him. And in the end he realizes the truth of non-dualism (Advaita)—that the part is the same as the whole, or rather that there is no such thing as part, for Infinity cannot be divided. In the first two positions of dualism and qualified non-dualism, he realizes the Personal God, with or without form, but with attributes; and in the last position of non-dualism he realizes the Impersonal Absolute without attributes.

The three systems of the Vedanta—dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism—represent three general standpoints from which the Reality is experienced, and may be said to comprehend all the other systems of philosophy with their characteristic features and minor variations, since no system can possibly begin at a stage lower and simpler than dualism, and no system can rise higher than non-dualism, the crowning apex of all philosophic thought. The system of qualified non-dualism is the type of philosophy representing a position between dualism and non-dualism.

The Scriptures contain texts that clearly express all the main aspects of the Truth as revealed in dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, and non-dualistic realizations. The *Upanishads* which form the earliest authority contain passages which clearly distinguish between God, soul and matter, and which are therefore considered dualistic. Says the *Mundaka Upanishad*—'Two birds of beautiful plumage and closely united in friendship reside on the selfsame tree. One of them eats the sweet fruits thereof, and the other witnesses without eating.'[1] The *Shwetashwatara Upanishad* declares: 'The two un-

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[1] III. i. 1.

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born, the intelligent and the non-intelligent, are the Lord and the non-Lord.'[1] These and similar passages refer to the soul and God. There are also passages which refer to the soul alone, and among these may be cited: (a) 'Then whoever feels, "I smell this"—that is the soul;'[2] (b) 'Who is the soul? He is that person who is luminous in the proximity to the *pranas* in the heart and wholly consists of knowledge;'[3] (c) 'He is indeed the seer, the hearer, the taster, the smeller, the thinker, the knower, the doer, the intelligent soul, the Purusha.'[4]

There is yet another class of texts which does not declare complete dualism like the dualistic texts quoted above, nor speak of the one Reality like the non-dualistic texts, but points to a position midway between dualism and non-dualism. These are the qualified non-dualistic passages, such as the following: (a) 'Indeed I will enter these three deities;'[5] (b) 'May I become manifold and be born;'[6] (c) 'That from which all these are born, in which when born they live, and into which they enter when they perish, do thou desire to know That well; That is Brahman;'[7] (d) 'The knowers of Brahman declare that in this body there are two who have entered into intelligence in the supreme cavity of the heart, enjoying the fruits of their good deeds, and who are as light and shade;'[8] (e) 'He who has entered

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i. 9.
[2] *Chhandogya Upanishad*, VIII. xii. 4.
[3] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. iii. 7.
[4] *Prashna Upanishad*, iv. 9.
[5] *Chhandogya Upanishad*, VI. iii. 2.
[6] Ibid., VI. ii. 3.
[7] *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, III. i. 1.
[8] *Katha Upanishad*, I. iii. i.

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within is the Ruler of all things that are born and is the soul of all.'[1]

Entirely different from the above two classes of passages are those which speak of an uncompromising non-dualism such as: (a) 'But where there is duality, as it were, there one sees another; but where to one all this becomes Self, there who shall see whom, by what, and who shall know, which by what?'[2] (b) 'That which is all this is this Self;'[3] (c) 'He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman indeed;'[4] (d) 'Existence alone, my dear son, was in the beginning, One only without a second;'[5] (e) 'That thou art.'[6]

Every one of the commentators—Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and others—in his commentary has taken up his own standpoint, bringing a mind illumined and directed by his own individual spiritual experience to bear upon his task, and interpreted all the passages uniformly. Passages which are distinctly expressive of non-dualistic truths have been interpreted as dualistic, and passages clearly indicative of dualistic revelations as non-dualistic. Every one of the commentators wanted to uphold his own position and popularize the system of thought which he expounded, and none has, therefore, hesitated to sacrifice the meaning that would appear to be the true and happy one in many passages to suit his own purpose.[7]

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[1] *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, III. xi. 1–2.

[2] Ibid., II. iv. 4.

[3] Ibid., IV. v. 7.

[4] *Mund. Upanishad*, III. ii. 9.

[5] *Chhandogya Upanishad*, VI. ii. 1.

[6] Ibid., VI. viii. 7.

[7] This was possible as Sanskrit grammar is very elastic. Swami Vivekananda called this 'text-torturing'!

The greatness of Sri Ramakrishna can be realized from the fact that he went to the root of the whole problem in his reconciliation of the different systems of philosophy, by pointing out the validity of the different kinds of experiences which form their authority, and encouraging everyone to progress along the path that suited him best.

IV

Sri Ramakrishna also taught that there are various ways to lead men to superconsciousness, and that these ways fall under the general category known in Hindu philosophy as the *yogas* (paths to divine communion); which have been divided into four main groups, namely *jnana yoga* or the path of discrimination, *bhakti yoga* or the path of devotion, *karma yoga* or the path of right activity, and *raja yoga* or the path of mind control. These paths are intended for those in whom the intellectual, emotional, volitional and meditative tendencies predominate over the other faculties. When these paths came to be taught and practised from ancient times in Hinduism, their followers, who could not fully comprehend their interrelation, came to misunderstand them, and naturally clashed. It was the glory of Sri Ramakrishna that he was able to reconcile them all by his experiences along each path. He taught that each path, and the method of procedure with its age-long traditions, are to be respected and followed, and that when one would practise and realize the goal, the value of all the paths and the relation between them would become apparent.

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Jnana (discrimination) and *bhakti* (devotion) are considered by most men to be contradictory, because one aims at realizing the Impersonal Absolute and the other the Personal God. The man of discrimination follows his path saying, 'Not this, not this,'[1] and thus brushes aside one thing after another, until he reaches a point where all discrimination between the Real and the unreal ceases, and the Absolute is realized in *nirvikalpa samadhi* (Contentless Consciousness); the man of devotion follows the path of love, forgets himself—his body and mind—in the pursuit of the ideal of love, and realizes his beloved Divine Being. Sri Ramakrishna declared: 'Knowledge and Love of God are ultimately one. There is no difference between pure Knowledge and pure Love.'[2] Then again, 'Pure Knowledge and pure Love are one and the same. Pure Knowledge leads to one and the same goal which is reached by pure Devotion.'[3] The *jnani* can attain *bhakti*, and the *bhakta* can attain *jnana*.

V

Yet another aspect of the grand spiritual synthesis in Sri Ramakrishna is the reconciliation of the Personal God and the impersonal Absolute, as well as the reconciliation between the various forms of the Personal God.

He pointed out that there is no contradiction between the Brahman of the *jnani* and the Love of the *bhakta*. 'Suppose there is an infinite expanse of water—water

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[1] '*Neti, neti*' of the *Upanishads*.

[2] *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 398.

[3] Ibid., 399.

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above, water below, water in all directions. At certain times of the year the water freezes with the cold, and again, when the days are warm, it thaws and becomes water. Brahman is like the infinite expanse of water. Those parts which are frozen into ice are the spiritual Personal forms of the Deity. The cold is the *bhakti* of the devotee, his love, his devotion, his self-surrender. The heat again is *jnana vichara* (discrimination between the Real and the unreal phenomenal universe) leading up to *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the total effacement of the self which says "I, I". To a *bhakta* the Lord manifests Himself in various forms. To one who reaches the height of Brahmajnana in *samadhi* He is the *nirguna* (attributeless) Brahman once more, formless (*nirakara*), unconditioned. Herein is the reconciliation between *jnana* and *bhakti*.'[1]

If Brahman is impersonal and formless, Love too is impersonal and formless. The *jnani* realizes Brahman beyond knower, known and knowledge; the *bhakta* too realizes that Love, the Lover, and the Beloved are One.[2]

'The *bhakta* will generally be content with realizing the Personal God, the Saguna Brahman of the *Upanishads*.'[3] He 'as a rule does not long for Brahmajnana, the realization of the Impersonal Absolute, but remains content with realizing the Divine Person alone, my Divine Mother or any of Her infinite forms of glory, such as the divine Incarnations, . . . the visible revelations of God. He is anxious that the whole of his ego shall not be effaced in *samadhi*. He would fain have sufficient individuality left to enjoy the Vision Divine as a person. He would fain taste sugar, instead of becoming sugar.'[1]

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[1] *Teachings*, 403.

[2] Swami Vivekananda, *Bhakti-Yoga*.

[3] *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 401

Sri Ramakrishna warned the Advaitist philosopher against decrying the worship of the Personal God. He taught: 'So long as there is the "I" in me, so long is there before me the Personal God, revealing Himself through various forms of glory, or as *jiva* (soul) and *iagat* (matter).[2]

'Even those who have realized the Absolute in *samadhi* come down to the lower plane of sense-consciousness, and have just sufficient ego (*aham*) left to hold communion with the Personal God. Is it not difficult to raise the voice incessantly to "ni" (corresponding to the "si" of the European musical scale), the highest note of the gamut?

'Hence, says the knowing one, is the necessity of a Personal God.[3]

'Let not the Advaitist say, "My position is the only correct, rational, and tenable one; those that believe in a Personal God are wrong." The Personal manifestations of God are by no means less real, but infinitely more real than the body, or the mind, or the external world.'[4]

His own experiences of both the Personal and the Impersonal enabled Sri Ramakrishna to enlighten even his great Advaitic *guru* Totapuri [5] who had realized the impersonal Absolute, but had no experience of the Personal God and the relation between Him and the impersonal Absolute. But by following the path of

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[1] Ibid., 387.
[2] *Sayings*, 852.
[3] *Sayings*, 863.
[4] *Sayings*, 850.
[5] See chapter vi.

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bhakti, one may attain not only the Personal God but also the impersonal Absolute. 'The Lord loves His devotee and will vouchsafe to him even Brahmajnana, if the *bhakta* hungers and thirsts after it.'[1] Referring to the Divine Mother he used to say, 'Only come to the Divine Mother and you will receive not only *bhakti* but also *jnana* if you wish. You will see Her not only in *bhava samadhi* (superconsciousness with visions), manifesting Herself in *sakara rupa*, forms Divine, but you will also realize Her as Brahman the Absolute in that *nirvikalpa samadhi* in which all self is effaced and there is no manifestation whatsoever, not even of the Divine forms, for it is *nirakara rupa* (transcending all idea of form).'[2] He used to explain this idea by means of analogies: '*Bhakti* is the moon, while *jnana* is the sun. I have heard that there are oceans in the extreme north and south: it is so cold there that the ocean freezes in parts, and masses of ice are formed in which ships are caught and held fast. Even so may a man be caught half-way in the path of *bhakti*. But it matters nothing, for the ice in which he is held is the solidified ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. If he were to reason, "Brahman alone is real; the whole universe is false," then the ice would thaw in the sun of *jnana*, and what would remain would be the formless waters of that ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.'[3] Sri Ramakrishna pointed out, 'He who is Brahman with attributes is Brahman beyond attributes.'[4]

Let it not be forgotten that though Sri Ramakrishna harmonized the Personal and Impersonal aspects of God, he at the same time exhorted everyone to stick to his own path and Chosen Ideal. He taught: '*Fix your mind on one thing only*, either the Personal God or the Impersonal.'[1]

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[1] *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 401.

[2] *Teachings*, 404.

[3] *Teachings*, 412.

[4] See *Sayings*, 871-82.

VI

Savikalpa samadhi (superconsciousness with content) cannot be considered to contradict *nirvikalpa samadhi*. It is an excellent preparation for the latter, since it develops concentration on one Divine form or on the attributes of the Lord, and the powers of concentration thus developed will be of great help in meditating on the impersonal Absolute without form and without attributes.

In his own simple way Sri Ramakrishna taught the profound truth that there is no conflict between the two kinds of *samadhis* (superconsciousness). 'My Divine Mother (the Personal phase of Brahman)', said he, 'has declared that She is the Brahman of the Vedanta. It is within Her power to give Brahmajnana, which She does by causing the effacement of the lower self.

'You may come to Brahman through *vichara* (discrimination), my Mother willing. Again, you may come through *bhakti*. Unceasing prayer for light and for love, and self-surrender to Her, are the elements of *bhakti*. First come to my Divine Mother (the Personal God) through these.

'Take my word for it that if your prayer is *antarika* (comes from the bottom of your heart), my Mother will respond to it, if you will only wait. Pray to Her again, if you want to realize Her impersonal Self. Should She deign to grant your prayer—and She is omnipotent—you will be in a position to realize Her impersonal Self in *samadhi*. This is precisely the same thing as Brahmajnana.'[1]

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[1] Cf. *Sayings*, 877.

That the meditation on the Personal aspect of God renders the mind fit for meditation on His Impersonal aspect is evident also from the instructions of Sri Krishna to Uddhava.[2] The great Teacher directs His disciple first to meditate on His form, concentrating the mind on all the features, and to withdraw the sense-organs from the sense-objects with the help of the mind; then, with the intellect as guide, to direct the mind to His whole body. He next asks him to concentrate that mind—distributed all over His body—on one part, namely the face, and think of the smiling countenance alone and nothing else. The Lord then asks Uddhava to withdraw the mind, which is concentrated on the face, and fix it on the Mahakarana (Supreme Cause)—the Lord as projecting the universe; finally, leaving that too, to rest on Him as the pure Brahman divested of all attributes, and think of nothing whatsoever (not even that he is meditating, that this is the object of meditation, and so on).

VII

The Personal God may be with or without form. God with attributes but without form, and God with attributes and with form, are both considered Personal, because the personality of the seeker remains.

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[1] *Sayings*, 803.

[2] *Srimad Bhagavatam*, XI. ix. 32–44.

When man wants to worship the Personal God with form, he is confronted with a variety of Divine forms, which are worshipped by the followers of different religions and sects. The question arises, 'Are these forms contradictory?'

In the post-Buddhistic age, the schools of Agamas arose, which advocated the worship of Shiva, Shakti, or Vishnu, according as each school upheld one or other of these deities. This resulted in the formation of sects in Hinduism, called the Shaivites, the Shaktas and the Vaishnavites, belonging to the Shaiva Agama, Shakta Agama and Vaishnava Agama or Pancharatra schools respectively, who were often at variance with one another for centuries. Besides the spiritual forms of Shiva, Shakti and Vishnu, there are other deities, namely Ganapati and Surya, who are also worshipped. Then there is the worship of the forms of the Divine Incarnations in Hinduism and other religions, like Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Chaitanya and so on, and also of those perfected souls whose hearts are passion-free.[1] The Buddhists worship the Buddha; the Christians worship Jesus Christ, Mary and the saints. Worship of differing aspects of the Deity in various spiritual forms gives rise to the formation of sects like the Shaivites, Shaktas and Vaishnavites, the Ganapatyas and the Souras, as in Hinduism, each of these sects developing its own traditions and forms. Sri Ramakrishna taught that all of these are to be respected, since they have evolved characteristic ways and means for the attainment of God, and such ways and means, which include certain customs and traditions, facilitate and hasten the spiritual progress of their respective votaries, who associate them with holiness and divinity. To mention but a few examples, the Shaktas eat meat, but the Vaishnavites do not. The Vaishnavites use *tulasi mala* (rosary made of *tulasi* beads) for counting, while the non-Vaishnavites use the *rudraksha mala* (rosary made of *rudraksha* beads).

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[1] Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras*, i. 37.

As for the variety of spiritual forms which are worshipped, Sri Ramakrishna taught that they are forms of the same Divine Being or Spirit. 'As the same sugar may be made into various figures of birds and beasts, so one sweet Divine Mother is worshipped in various climes and ages under various names and in diverse forms.'[1] Again: 'As various ornaments having different forms and names are made out of the same lump of gold, so in different ages and countries, under different names in various forms one God is worshipped. How various the fashions of His worship! Though some love to call Him Father, and others Mother, yet it is one God who is worshipped under so many names, in all these ways.'[2] Sri Ramakrishna also used to say that God assumes many forms, as the chameleon puts on many colours: 'The devotee who has seen Him in one aspect only, knows that aspect alone. But only he who has seen Him in manifold aspects, can say, "All these forms are of one God, for God is multiform." '[3] In one of his parables in which four blind men, who went to see an elephant, quarrelled among themselves, in just the same manner men quarrel about religion, each having seen some different aspect of the Deity.[1]

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[1] *Teachings*, 690.
[2] Ibid., 690.
[3] Ibid., 687.

It was Sri Ṛamakrishna's experience that the Lord with forms can exist also as the Spirit without forms but with attributes, and as the Absolute without forms and without attributes.

VIII

Last but not least comes the harmony of the various *varnashrama* ideals—ideals of the *varnas* or divisions of society and of the *ashramas* or stages of the individual's life—which Sri Ramakrishna taught.

Sri Ramakrishna preached that, whatever be the division or class of society in which a person is born, and whatever the stage of life in which he finds himself, he should consider God as the *summum bonum* of existence, and so tune his life and work as ultimately to reach the spiritual goal. He did not say a person or any *varna* is superior or inferior to a person of another *varna*. He held that 'he is born in vain who, having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realize God in this life.'[2] He also used to say, 'He is man (*manush*) who is discriminative (*manhunsh*).'

Sri Ramakrishna himself had attained the highest ideal of all *varnas* and *ashramas*. He had become a Paramahamsa, the last word in individual and social evolution. His own life and teachings embody that ideal —the conception of the Paramahamsa state—which is enshrined in the heart of India. It will have to become the ideal of humanity, if the life of the world is to be in harmony with the life of the spirit.

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[1] Ibid., 689. [2] *Sayings*, 2.

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CHAPTER XI

THE TEACHING IN HIS OWN WORDS

I. God of all religions the same. II. Different religions as paths to God. III. The cause and cure of fanaticism. IV. The foolishness of fanaticism. V. Right attitude towards religious differences. VI. Divine Incarnations.

I

1. As one and the same water is called by different names by different peoples, some calling it 'water', some 'vari', some 'aqua' and some 'pani', so the one Sat-Chit-Ananda—Existence-Intelligence-Bliss Absolute—is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Hari and by others as Brahman.

2. In a potter's shop there are vessels of different shapes and forms—pots, jars, dishes, plates, etc.—but all made of the same clay. So God is one, but He is worshipped in different ages and climes under different names and in different aspects.

3. Once a dispute arose among the learned men at the court of the Maharajah of Burdwan as to who was the greater of the two deities, Shiva and Vishnu. Some of the courtiers said that Shiva was greater, while the others gave preference to Vishnu. When the dispute grew hot, a wise pandit remarked, 'Sir, I have seen neither Shiva nor Vishnu. How can I say who is the

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greater of the two?' Similarly, do not try to compare one deity with another. When you do see one of them, you will come to know that they are all the manifestations of the same Brahman.

II

4. There are several bathing-ghats in a large tank. Whoever goes, choosing whichever ghat he pleases, to take a bath or to fill his vessel, reaches the water; it is useless to quarrel with one another by calling one's own ghat better than another's. Similarly, there are many ghats that lead to the water of the fountain of Eternal Bliss. Every religion of the world is one such ghat. Go direct with a sincere and earnest heart by any one of these ghats, and you will reach the water of Eternal Bliss; but do not say that your religion is better than that of another.

5. Many are the names of God and infinite the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him, through that you will realize Him.

6. The cries of all jackals are the same: so are the teachings of all the wise ones the same.

III

7. Through ignorance a common man considers his own religion to be the best and makes much useless clamour; but when his mind is illumined by true knowledge, all sectarian quarrels disappear.

8. Two persons were hotly disputing as to the colour

of a chameleon. One said, 'The chameleon on that palm tree is of a beautiful red colour.' The other contradicted him saying, 'You are mistaken; the chameleon is not red, but blue.' Being unable to settle the matter by argument, both went to a man who always lived under that tree and had watched the chameleon in all its phases. One of the disputants asked, 'Sir, is not the chameleon on that tree of a red colour?' The man replied, 'Yes, sir.' The other disputant said, 'What do you say? How is that possible? Surely it is not red, but blue?' The man again humbly replied, 'Yes, sir.' He knew that the chameleon constantly changed its colour. So he said 'Yes' to both the conflicting views. God who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, has likewise various forms. The devotee who has seen God only in one aspect knows that and only that aspect. None but he who has seen Him in manifold aspects can say, 'All these forms are of the one God, for God is multi-form.' He is formless and with form, and many are His forms which no one knows.

9. Men may partition their land by measuring-rods and boundary lines, but no one can so partition the all-embracing sky overhead. The undivided sky surrounds all and includes all. So the unenlightened man in his ignorance says that his religion is the only true one and that it is the best; but when his heart is illumined by the light of true Knowledge, he comes to know that above all these wars of sects and creeds is the one Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (Akhanda Sat-Chit-Ananda).

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IV

10. Be not a bigot like Ghantakarna. There was a man who worshipped Shiva, but hated all the other deities. One day Shiva appeared to him and said, 'I shall never be pleased with you so long as you hate other gods.' But the man was inexorable. After a few days Shiva again appeared to him. This time he appeared as Hari-Hara—a form of which one half was Shiva and the other Vishnu. At this the man was half pleased and half displeased. He laid his offerings on the side representing Shiva, but nothing on that representing Vishnu. When he offered the burning incense to Shiva, his beloved form of the Deity, he was audacious enough to press the nostril of Vishnu lest he should inhale the fragrance. Then Shiva said, 'Your bigotry is ineradicable. By assuming this dual aspect, I tried to convince you that all gods and goddesses are but the various aspects of the one Being. You have not taken the lesson in good part and you will have to suffer for your bigotry. Long must you suffer for this.' The man went away and retired to a village. He soon developed into a great hater of Vishnu. On coming to know this peculiarity of his, the children of the village began to tease him by uttering the name of Vishnu within his hearing. Vexed by this, the man hung two bells on his ears, and when the boys cried out, 'Vishnu, Vishnu,' he would ring the bells and make those names inaudible to his ears. Thus he came to be known by the name of Ghantakarna, meaning the Bell-eared.

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V

11. Whoever performs devotional exercises, in the belief that there is but one God, is bound to attain Him, no matter in what aspect, name or manner He is worshipped.

12. You will advance in whatever way you meditate on Him or recite His holy names. The cake made of sugar candy will taste equally sweet whether it is held straight or oblique when you eat it.

13. *Q.* If the God of every religion is the same, why is it then that God is conceived differently by the followers of different religions?

A. God is one, but His aspects are many. As the master of a house is father to one, brother to another and husband to a third, and is called by different names by different persons, so the one God is described in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to His particular worshipper.

14. As a mother, in nursing her sick children, gives rice and curry to one, sago and arrowroot to another, and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out different paths for different men suited to their natures.

15. Shankaracharya's monistic exposition of the Vedanta is indeed true, and true also is Ramanuja's exposition of it—his Vishishtadvaita philosophy (qualified monism).

16. Let a man be a Christian in the matter of mercy, a Moslem in the matter of strict observance of external

forms, and a Hindu in the matter of universal charity towards all living creatures.

17. When you go out and mix with people, you should have love for them all; mix with them freely and become one with them. You should not shrug your shoulders and hate them, saying, 'They believe in a Personal God, and not in the Impersonal,' or 'They believe in the Impersonal, and not in the Personal,' or 'He is a Christian,' or a Hindu, or a Mussalman, as the case may be. Man understands about Him only so much as He makes him understand.

Moreover, knowing that men are of different tendencies, you should mix with them as much as you can; and you should love all. Then returning to your own 'home' (heart) you will enjoy bliss and peace. There you will meet your own real self.

18. A truly religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths leading to the Truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.

19. Dispute not. As you rest firmly on your own faith and opinion, allow others also equal liberty to stand by their own faith and opinion. By mere disputation you will never succeed in convincing another of his error. When the grace of God descends on him, every man will understand his own mistakes.

20. One day the Master was heard talking in a God-intoxicated state to the Mother of the universe: 'Mother, everyone says, "My watch keeps correct time." The Christians, the Hindus, the Mohammedans, all say, "My religion is the true religion." But, Mother, nobody's watch is exact. Who can truly know Thee? But

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again, if one seeks Thee with a yearning heart, one can reach Thee by Thy grace through any path, through any religion.'

VI

21. The Incarnations are to Brahman (the Absolute) as waves are to the ocean.

22. The Avatara (Incarnation) is always one and the same. Having plunged into the ocean of life, the one God rises up at one point and is known as Krishna, and when, after another plunge, He rises up at another point, He is known as Christ.

23. The Incarnations are born with Divine powers and Divine qualities. They can go into, and stay in, any state of realization from the highest to the lowest. In a king's palace a stranger can go only to the outer quarters, but the king's own child, the prince of the house, is free to go to every corner.

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CHAPTER XII

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE MESSAGE

I. Significance of the teaching. II. Its value. III. The problem of conversion—Is conversion essential?—Causes of conversion—Weaker communities and proselytizing religions—Evils of conversion—The ancient process of Aryanization—India's religions—Necessity for weaker communities to organize for self-preservation—Some necessary corollaries of the principle of the Harmony of Religions. IV. The influence of the Hindu ideal of religious reconciliation on East and West. V. Friendly contact between religions—Its effect on cultures and civilizations.

I

The vast and all-comprehensive synthesis arrived at by Sri Ramakrishna is a spiritual verity. It was not designed, but discovered; it was not reasoned out, but revealed. It has, therefore, all the permanence of a natural law or scientific truth.

Why, then, is our vision of the Harmony of Religions dimmed? The story is told of a forester and a lion who were walking together and fell to discussing the inevitable question, Who is the stronger, a lion or a man? Finding it utterly impossible to solve the problem to their mutual satisfaction, they continued walking and came suddenly upon a piece of statuary representing a man in the act of throwing a lion. 'There,' exclaimed the forester, 'you see, man is the stronger!' 'Ah! yes,' replied the lion, 'but their positions would have been

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reversed if a lion had been the sculptor.' Man usually portrays religions other than his own in ugly colours. It is rather as every mother thinks her own child the most beautiful in the world.

In refreshing contrast to the misrepresentation of religions through selfishness and pride, illustrated with gentle irony by the fable, is the grand principle of the Harmony of Religions enunciated by Sri Ramakrishna and illustrated by a picture belonging to Surendranath Mitra. The picture depicted a Hindu temple, a Muslim mosque and a Christian church, with the votaries of the respective religions gathering together and shaking hands in peace and goodwill. The picture was so pleasing that Keshab Chandra Sen, the great leader of the Brahmo Samaj, praised it and said, 'Blessed is the man who has conceived the idea.'

What will be the outcome of Ramakrishna's teaching if it is carried out in practice? When the influence of the teaching permeates all faiths and communities, dissensions and conflicts in the name of religion will cease. All members of the human family will feel drawn together in bonds of love and sympathy, strengthened by a mutual understanding and appreciation of the worth of each other's religion. We shall cease to think of tolerance as the 'loveliest flower on the rose-bush of liberalism', for it has an air of patronizing condescension about it. When the truth and the greatness of all religions are recognized, men will not be simply content to tolerate religions other than their own, but will take a reverential attitude towards them. It will then be possible for a spiritual teacher whose religious background is of one type, to help actively a devotee whose background is of another. The spiritual discovery of Sri Ramakrishna will strengthen the followers of every religion and sect, for they will be able to draw fresh inspiration and receive a new impetus for the practice of their own religions.

II

When the clash and clamour caused by religious intolerance ceases, that part of the collective energy which is being wasted in carrying on religious warfare, overtly or covertly, will be diverted into more useful channels of constructive thought and activity; and if proper guidance is given to it, it can be utilized for the intensification of spirituality and the development of spiritual culture. The doctrine of the Harmony of Religions is itself based on the practical realization of the essential truth of all religions; and its application in life, individual and collective, will shift the emphasis from the differences in forms and rituals to the cultivation of moral virtues and the practice of spiritual disciplines for the edification and illumination of man—from non-essentials to essentials, from theory to practice. Practical spirituality is a great need of the world today. We want peace and light more than ever before. The problems of the world arise from the lack of the deeper vision both of the unity of life and of the purpose of life.

The acceptance of the doctrine of the Harmony of Religions is also sure to bring in its wake greater liberty in religious thought and life than obtains at present. The very conception of the essential unity of all religions will tend to liberate the mind from prejudice, as well as from unquestioning acceptance of mere dogmatism.

Men will have ample freedom of thought, and this will conduce to their mental growth and spiritual development. In the great spiritual and intellectual renaissance that is always born of such liberty, science will shake hands with religion, while philosophy will cease to be merely speculative and become intuitive and practical. This is specially necessary in the West today, where science is divorced from religion, and theology from philosophy. With spiritual experience as the central theme—the *summum bonum* of life—philosophies and theologies will discard the dead accretions of centuries and, revivified by that experience, will display a harmony with the truths of spiritual life, which, in essence, was there all the time.

The acceptance of the teaching of the truth of all religions will pave the way for a slow and silent interchange of healthy principles and precepts between the world's religious systems, without the central basis or characteristic note of any one of them being altered or lost. It is a fact that all systems of religion arise, grow and develop in accordance with certain laws. Each religion is born of the experience of a great Teacher or Prophet, who is its founder. The system associated with his name is built on the foundation of his realizations and teachings. It grows and develops as time goes on, drawing its sustenance and strength from the past thought and traditions that are in accord with its fundamental principles, and are therefore acceptable to it. Christianity evolved from Judaism, and Buddhism and Jainism from Hinduism. Adaptation for the purpose of preservation and continuity is necessary not only in the biological world, but also in the realm of thought, culture and religion. When an interchange of ideas takes place between religions under the inspiration of the Harmony of Religions, the aloofness which religions display towards each other today will be replaced by cordiality. There will be better understanding between the followers of the Semitic and the Aryan religions; there will be greater unity amongst the followers of the ancient mother faith of Hinduism and the followers of Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism, the branches of Aryan thought, which are often wrongly considered as alien to or different from Hinduism; and there will be greater fellowship between the sects of every religion, and the communities of every creed, their followers sharing in each other's weal and woe.

III

With the acceptance of the Harmony of Religions, conversion in the narrow, accepted sense of the term will tend to disappear. This does not mean that the preaching and teaching of religions will end for ever, but glorification of one faith at the expense of other faiths will give place to dissemination of the truths and principles of the various religions by their respective votaries. Preachers and teachers will not consider it their duty to do the destructive work of 'weaning away' the so-called infidels or heathens or unbelievers from the social and cultural environments in which they happen to be placed and admitting them into a new fold with the ceremony of baptism or its equivalent, but will concentrate their energies on the teaching of love and faith, reverence and worship, letting everyone grow according to his or her own law of individual evolution.

It is possible that in the cases of some persons (who are few and far between), spiritual inspiration may come from religions other than those to which they belong. They may need spiritual help from outside their religion, but such help should be rendered in a spirit of service without doing violence to the religion of their birth, without any sectarian motive, and without taking advantage of the need for such help to make them converts. Spiritual growth is always possible without a formal change of one's religion, and without deserting the fold to which one belongs by birth. If a person lacks faith in his own religion, it can be restored by proper study and reflection, right interpretation and understanding. Even if he wants to draw inspiration from the teachings of any other religion which, he may consider, furnishes a key to better understanding and a more spiritual life, he can grow from the position in which he stands by assimilating those teachings, yet remaining in his own religion.

The above procedure is calculated to strengthen the bonds of relationship between the followers of different religions. It is quite in conformity with the principle of the Harmony of Religions—that all religions are but different paths to God. But we do see in the world around us that high principles are not easy of acceptance, and still less easy of practice. Conversions go on and are supported by the belief that the religion to which conversion is made is the only true or completely true one in the world! It is worth while enquiring into the causes of conversion.

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The view held by some that men change their creed and seek admission to the fold of another religion for purely religious reasons is wrong. Considering the reports of Christian missionaries who have been preaching and publishing the teachings of the Bible in all the known languages[1] of the world in a highly organized and vigorous manner for many years, one finds that they all agree that the results obtained among the higher castes (or communities) are meagre.[2] Among the Hindus, for example, if there is to be any conversion to Christianity at all, no mass movement can be expected; but the individual, in the words of the Christian writer himself,[3] 'must break away, must burst out, tearing, as it were, the living tissues that bind him to his kith and sect.' From the facts gathered together by the same writer, 'the hypothesis is warranted that the response tends to be unfavourable—to be indifference or opposition—when the individual concerned is an intimate member of a group with a highly developed and complex culture. By complex culture groups we mean, in the light of the cases we have examined, those having the following features or culture traits: (1) history, traditional and usually written, covering generations or centuries; (2) special rites or at least doctrines, customs, taboos, growing out of this history and now consciously ascribed to it; (3) a sacred book or books; (4) a sense of group prestige that has survived conflict with other cultures; and (5) an organization of leadership (outside of the immediate family) for preserving and passing on the tradition.'

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[1] In 875 languages and dialects, according to the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1969.

[2] Maurice T. Price, *Christian Missions and Oriental Civilizations*.

[3] Ibid.

Among the causes of conversion which spreads, therefore, only among the low, oppressed and poorest classes, the writer mentions (1) the need of food, which compels non-Christians to make an initial response to the approach of missionaries; (2) the healing of the sick, which creates confidence; (3) the running of schools and colleges; (4) love or the desire to marry one who belongs to the Christian faith; and (5) the desire for economic and social advantage.[1]

In modern times the use of physical force is indeed rejected, but in the words of Dr. Coomaraswamy, 'all that money, social influence, educational bribery and misrepresentation can effect, is treated as legitimate. With all this is often combined great devotion and sincerity of purpose; the combination is dangerous in the extreme. . . .'[2]

What is said here by both a Christian and a non-Christian writer, is with reference to the Christian missionaries, but it also applies to most other missionaries of the proselytizing religions. It is strange that they do not expect the followers of other faiths to be actuated by a similar devotion and sincerity of purpose. The fact is that almost every missionary thinks that his own religion is the only true, or the only completely true, path![3] Other religions are either false, or at the most partly, but not wholly, true. If they are partly true, they are at best but a preparation for embracing his own religion! If the missionary of every religion thinks in this strain, how can there be peace and harmony in the world? One can fancy God smiling at this attitude!

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[1] See *Modern Review* for 1925, page 415.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See article on 'Syncretic Tendencies Today" by the Rev. L. P. Larsen in the *Student World* (1935).

In striking contrast with the blindly narrow and sectarian view which regards one's religion as the only true (or the only completely true) path, is the view expressed by some Christian writers themselves. In a thought-provoking article entitled 'In Praise of Heathenism',[1] a Christian writer observes: 'Much has been spoken and written about the difficulties of Christianizing the so-called heathen. One who has lived for any considerable time in the East comes to have serious doubts as to the desirability of doing so, even if it were possible.' The writer expresses this view from her personal knowledge of men and affairs. She points out how the Christian converts, who are recruited mostly from the lowest classes, are not necessarily benefited morally and spiritually by their change of creed. Nay, being drawn away from their natural environment and the healthy influences of their simple faith, these humble people often degenerate in their moral and religious life, and even learn some of the vices of their Western co-religionists. Describing the state of the poor peasant convert, she says, 'Where once he called on Vishnu or Shiva, he now turns a bewildered face up to the empty skies, shorn of the garments of his dreams. The more puritanical his teacher, the more he is divested of beauty. All things that were natural and free to him are wrong; all that he thought good is bad; . . . his imaginative and satisfying theology is ridiculed; he is a sinner, a savage, and a creature of scornful pity. He received a vague, delusive, cold and unfamiliar maze of words in exchange for all the beloved and intimate manifestation of his old belief. The new religion does not make him happy, because it is an imperfect system, imperfectly practised and taught.' Thus instead of intensifying the simple faith of the poor convert, the missionary in many a case undermines his very religious nature. For this the missionary's narrow conception of religious life, coupled with his poor comprehension of its psychology, is solely responsible. The writer therefore adds: 'The average revivalist is seldom intelligent enough to have studied, for purposes of comparison, if nothing more, some or all of the twenty Bibles of the world that exist beside his own. He has not considered the value of Mohammed, Buddha, Zoroaster, or even Confucius and Lao Tze, as great teachers inspired to benefit humanity. He, as a Christian, belongs to the army of the world's greatest snobs.' These words are an indictment of the negative side of missionary work. The positive side, namely educational, social, economic and other forms of service done by the missionary, is, however, thoroughly praiseworthy.

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[1] 'In Praise of Heathenism' by Lily Strickland Anderson, in the *Open Court* for 1926.

The process of Aryanization adopted by the authors of the Hindu socio-religious system was entirely different from missionary practice, with its baptism and changing of names. The Aryanizing process did not resort to the extermination or cultural enslavement of aboriginal and foreign tribes. Each community was first allowed to imbibe the Aryan culture, and then to settle down within the bounds of the Hindu socio-religious polity (*varnashrama*). It maintained its own distinctive individuality and followed its own law of growth. As Sir Alfred Lyall observed: 'The clans and races which inhabit the hill tracts, the outlying uplands and the uncleared jungle districts of India are melting into Hinduism all over India by a process much more rapid and effective than individual conversions. Among all these aboriginal or non-Aryan communities, a continued social change is going on; they alter their modes of life to suit improved conditions of existence; their languages decay, and they gradually go over to the dominant Aryan rituals. They pass into Brahmanists by a natural upward transition which leads them to adopt the religion of the castes immediately above them in the social scale of the composite population among whom they settle down.'[1] Thus both 'gods and worshippers' are refined and civilized. The group, not the individual, is taken as the unit in such a process.

The basis of Aryanization in its socio-religious aspect is genuinely altruistic. In other systems the individual is the unit; when he acquires power or amasses wealth he leaves his class to its fate and becomes a member of a higher class; but in the Hindu socio-religious system, if the individual wants to rise to the higher caste, he can do so only by taking the whole community along with him.

Admirable though such a method is, it cannot be applied universally under modern conditions. Neither India, nor for that matter any other country, is isolated from the rest of the world. It cannot therefore conduct, as in the past, social or socio-religious experiments without taking altered conditions into account. Moreover,

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[1] Sir Alfred Lyall, *Asiatic Studies*.

though the process mentioned above is more rapid and effective than individual conversions among the higher communities, it cannot compare with the increasing number of conversions to other religions that have been taking place amongst the lower and poorer communities which are attracted by social, educational and economic advantages. India is the home of many religions today. Individual conversions will also be found necessary along with the ancient process of Aryanization.

For certain reasons, a consideration of which will be beyond the scope of the subject,[1] the ancient ideal of *varnashrama* or socio-religious system of the Hindus became rigid and immobile during the period that followed the rise of Buddhism, and again a few centuries before the advent of Islam in India. Hinduism became conservative in both religious and social life. The masses had been left where they were without much chance for social or cultural elevation, or religious uplift. The Muslims who conquered India had therefore a good opportunity to make converts among the masses; and these converts, who have increased in number with the passing of centuries, have remained in Islam to this day, attracted by its highly democratic principles and equality in social life. For every four Hindus in undivided India there was a Muslim. Whereas the ancient clans, tribes and communities—the Sakas, Kushans and

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[1] It may, however, be mentioned that, in the post-Buddhist period, breaking of the caste system resulted in the indiscriminate mixing of all castes, and consequent racial and cultural deterioration. Reformers subsequently arose and divided the people into distinct castes with definite rules and regulations. Cf. *Lectures on India through the Ages* by Sir Jadunath Sircar, 2nd lecture.

Huns, the Scythians, Bactrians and Parthians, the Abhiras, Gardhabilas and Bahalikas—yielded to the assimilative power of Hinduism, the Muslims remained a distinct element. With the rise of the Christian power, Christianity also has been making converts among the Hindu masses, but not with the same success as Islam. If Islam had not been the religion of a large section of the Indian population, there might have been many times the present number of Christians in the land. Islam being an actively proselytizing religion, the activities of the Christian missionaries have been confined to the lower sections of the Hindu fold. To the Hindus, Muslims and Christians add the handful of Parsis, Jews, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs, and you have a picture of modern India with its many faiths. Of these, Hinduism is among the least active as a proselytizing religion.

Conversions of individuals or families of the weaker and poorer sections of any religious community are generally made in the absence of such advantages in its fold as are afforded by the missionaries of the proselytizing religions. Though the doctrine of the Harmony of Religions is a spiritual verity like other truths and ideals of humanity, time must elapse before it is generally recognized and accepted by the leaders and followers of all faiths. Conversions from a community cannot, therefore, cease for ever, unless the members, especially those of the lower strata of its society, enjoy equal spiritual and secular advantages with those of the higher classes or castes. Such conversions are a source of weakness and danger to the community. Therefore it was that Swami Vivekananda pointed out that so long as the other religions are actively engaged in making converts, the less organized community, from which the perverts had come, should take steps to re-admit them. This is why the Shuddhi movement[1] has arisen; and now there is a greater need to organize the Hindu fold than ever before. It need hardly be added that the duty of organizing with a view to securing secular and spiritual advantages to one and all in a community devolves on the community itself. This duty was recognized centuries before Jesus Christ was born; for Krishna preached spiritual equality for all, and Buddha both spiritual and social equality. It is a remarkable feature of almost every community today that it is becoming more and more conscious of its power and need for self-determination, not only in politics and nationalism, but also in culture and religion. Is it not significant that Sri Ramakrishna came in the modern era and preached the grand doctrine of the Harmony of Religions which strengthens every faith and weakens none?

Conversion has gone on apace for years past among the weaker communities. Whatever be the causes of such conversion—economic, political or otherwise—it has created problems of a complicated nature. Conversions of the remote past—whether just or not—which resulted in the complete absorption of the converted individuals or communities, cannot be viewed in the same light as forcible or otherwise unjust conversions, or conversions under more or less suspicious circumstances that have taken place recently. The perverts who have been taken away from the folds to which they belong by birth may have to be brought back, if necessary. In practical application, a policy of give-and-take

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[1] This was organized by the Arya Samaj.

will have to be adopted in a manner that is compatible with the necessity for preserving and protecting all religions, and at the same time contributing to the general religious welfare of mankind in the light of the Harmony of Religions. When serious difficulties arise as the result of years of conversion, leaders of the different communities concerned may confer and deliberate on a plan of action which will result in the cessation of a spirit of hostility, and in the promotion of a feeling of conciliation.

With a view to fostering a spirit of fellowship between the different proselytizing faiths, the leaders of the religious communities would do well to adopt some such guiding principles as those given below, which may be regarded as the necessary corollaries of the grand doctrine of the Harmony of Religions—of the great truth that all religions are but different paths to God:

(1) Conversion should only be the result of a change of heart through an appreciation of other spiritual ideals and their assimilation in accordance with one's own law of growth. The urge must come from within. There should be no preaching and propaganda aimed at coaxing a person from his religious fold.[1]

(2) Among primitive peoples, the *opportunity* of imbibing deeper religious doctrines is required, rather than organized proselytism. It is worse than useless to impose such doctrines from without. Primitive communities must be allowed to take from more developed religions what can meet their inner need.

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[1] This will be acceptable only when *spiritual edification alone* is aimed at, and not when a missionary of a proselytizing creed wants to add to the *number* of his converts.

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(3) If any person desires to worship Rama or Krishna, Buddha or Jesus, or any other embodiment of the spiritual ideal of any religion whatsoever, he or she should be given the liberty of doing so without relinquishing the family, society or religion to which he or she belongs by birth.[1]

(4) Rendering spiritual or religious service to an individual should be kept distinct from social, educational and economic service.[2]

(5) Vigorous attempts should be made to shift the emphasis from institutionalized religion to religion experienced in the heart; and from quantity to quality where conversions occur.

(6) Cultural and spiritual elevation alone should be the motives for conversion.

Unless the above, or similar, principles are observed, the weaker communities are likely to organize opposition in self-defence. The result, increased antagonism and sectarianism, is the exact opposite of what all religions attempt, that is, to bind men together.[3]

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[1] This idea has been recognized by Hinduism alone with its theory of Ishtam, according to which one can attain spiritual development only by adoring the spiritual form or ideal that one loves most. But we should remember that it is only a few in any community that would need the worship of a spiritual form or ideal worshipped by any other community.

[2] Social, educational and economic service should be treated as a common duty of every man to be done to brother-man in times of need, irrespective of caste, creed or colour. This ideal is practised by those philanthropic and social workers—lay and monastic—who follow the teachings of Ramakrishna.

[3] Religious movements which come into existence to fill a need are usually of three kinds: (a) reactionary or checkmating movements like the movement of the Sikhs under the leadership of Guru Govind Singh, or of the Mahrattas under the inspiration of the preaching of Ramdas and the songs of Tukaram; (b) assimilative movements like the movement of Chaitanya, the great Vaishnava teacher of Bengal, which resus-

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IV

It is indeed pleasing to find that the influence of the Hindu ideal of reconciliation is slowly penetrating East and West. The great truth that all religions are but different expressions of the one Universal Religion, and that they all have emanated from one and the same Divine Source is recognized only by Hinduism. That is why the Hindu is not interested in converting others. As inner experience deepens, he knows that barriers disappear; the higher and higher the experience he attains, more and more meaningless do conversion and its necessity appear to him.

Hinduism stands for the universalization of the world's religious thoughts by helping men and women to realize the unity behind the variety of paths and creeds, sects and dogmas. The theory of Ishtam (Chosen Ideal) is peculiarly its own; it is the only religion which boldly proclaims that one is at liberty to worship any Chosen Ideal that one loves most. Its universality is imperceptibly influencing the Western mind and even transforming the mentality of the missionaries of some religions. Says Dean Inge: 'There is a common ethical and spiritual ideal influencing the whole civilized world, and each people tries to find it in its own religion, and does find it there. . . . Suppose they (the Asiatics) worship a being with the same attributes. It does not matter

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citated the spiritual and cultural consciousness of the country in the days of the expansion of Islam in eastern India and even assimilated many Muslims; (c) quiet, all-absorbing movements like the Buddhist movement which silently protested against the current false beliefs and abuses of society and spread all over the civilized world.

very much whether they call him Buddha or Christ. We must look to things rather than words.' A desirable change in the outlook of the missionary was also indicated by the late Mr. K. T. Paul, an Indian Christian leader,[1] 'Every religion is from God, but the culmination of it all is in the revelation through Jesus Christ. That was in short the new attitude not merely tolerant but reverent and constructive towards all non-Christian religions . . . The best missionary opinion is now moving away from that attitude. There is a more humble approach to the whole question. If God has been speaking to the Hindus through their experience and history as individuals and groups for forty long centuries of unbroken religious history, obviously He has trained them to understand and interpret His mind in ways different from those disciplined in totally different conditions of life and thought to which the missionary belongs.'

Toleration will surely give rise to reconciliation, and reconciliation to co-operation and true fellowship of faiths. It was such a fellowship of faiths that Swami Vivekananda proclaimed at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago—'Do I wish that the Christian should become a Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist should become a Christian? God forbid. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian; but each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.'[2]

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[1] See *Swarajya*, Annual Supplement for 1925.

[2] Swami Vivekananda, *Chicago Addresses*.

V

Friendly contact between religions paves the way for contact between the cultures and civilizations that have grown round the religions themselves. The unity of purpose, and the affinity of aspirations underlying the acceptance of the harmony of religions, will diffuse from the plane of religion to the plane of cultural thought, and pave the way for the concord of cultures and symphony of civilizations. Communal and national, as well as regional and racial cultures and civilizations, will be benefited by contact between themselves. They will lose the spirit of narrowness and exclusiveness, and contribute their share to world culture and world civilization.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE IDEAL OF HUMANITY

I. The ideal of humanity. II. True nationalism and internationalism. III. Concord of cultures and symphony of civilizations—Their synthesis. IV. Reconciliation of religions—Religion in national and international, communal and social life—True spirit of religion—Religion as a force —Sense of unity and brotherhood taught by all religions—Ramakrishna's lesson to India and the world.

I

It is refreshing to find that even in the midst of the disharmony and discord between nations and races, creeds and colours, cultures and civilizations, indications are not wanting of an intelligent synthetic understanding of the purpose of life and the destiny of man. The ideal is indeed that grand Confraternity of men, which is beyond all narrowness and aggressiveness of vulgar nationalism, hatred and jealousies of race—that Parliament of Man and Federation of the World which will rise above the clash of races and nations, of cultures and civilizations, of creeds and sects. Such an ideal, however, cannot be realized by a destructive process which will end the elements that clash, but only by a constructive synthesis of a broad and manifold character, which, in its comprehensiveness, will form the bedrock of peace and harmony between them. This ideal, like all other ideals, is hard to realize; but it is worth

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striving for, for all progress consists in the striving. And in the realization of this great and glorious ideal of humanity in its spiritual and cultural aspect, Sri Ramakrishna's contribution has not been inconsiderable.

II

An attempt to realize one phase of the ideal has been made in recent times by the enunciation of the principle of self-determination, and by the formation of the League of Nations, and subsequently of U.N., as an International Court of Justice. But such aims, however lofty, cannot be achieved in any degree whatsoever without the necessary preparations and disciplines leading to the establishment of a moral and ethical basis. The instinct of individualism cannot be suppressed by the mere formulation of theoretical conceptions of international justice and self-determination as the most essential factors in the removal of all hindrances to national self-expression. Just as man does not become a saint by mere acceptance of the ideal of perfection and divinity, but has to strive hard to attain it, so a true internationalism can only be attained on the training ground of a true nationalism, which looks upon the world as one organic whole of which all the peoples are parts. 'Every people has its special mission,' said Mazzini,[1] 'which will co-operate towards the fulfilment of the general mission of Humanity; that mission constitutes its nationality.'

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[1] *Essays.*

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III

So also with cultures and civilizations. If their clash and conflict are to be avoided, love and sympathy for cultures and civilizations other than one's own should grow; only on such foundations can a happy synthesis be built. Each culture and civilization should assimilate what it can of the best of the others. It may grow according to its own law of development, but should avoid all aloofness and separateness, and, most important, all aggressiveness and militancy.

In this synthesis, which has already begun, the East and the West are playing the roles of teacher and taught in turn. The West is teaching the East her sciences, her technical and industrial efficiency, her secrets of organization and other virtues, which are enabling the East increasingly to stand on her own legs in national matters. The East, on the other hand, has sifted her religion and philosophy, shorn them of unessential accretions, and begun to disseminate these treasures of spiritual thought which are of universal consequence, and to teach the West her meditativeness and introspection, her love of serenity and devotion, her sweetness of peace and tolerance; for this will enable the West to turn her rich energy to the noblest purposes.

IV

No programme of synthesis can be complete or successful unless the problem of the conflict of creeds is taken into account. No Parliament of Man can be a true Parliament, and no Federation of the World can

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be a true Federation, until the doctrine of the Harmony of Religions, sects and denominations is accepted and followed; for religion stirs the very innermost depths of man's being, and in the words of the ancient Hindu sages and of the Stoics, it is the finest and fairest fruit of all cultures and civilizations—the goal towards which they are consciously or unconsciously moving. 'Of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destinies of the human race, none certainly is more potent than that the manifestation of which we call by the name of religion.'[1]

Religion in national and international, communal and social life should be applied in the right manner. Its abuse is due to its prostitution for narrow patriotic ambitions or base political ends, for the enrichment of commerce and the expansion of industry, for fanning the flames of racial jealousy or national hatred. It should be freed from all shackles of perverse parochialism and crude creedalism, and be the source of spiritual peace and joy to all humanity. If God is infinite, Religion, His garment, should be as ample as the universe around us and be co-extensive with the cosmos. For sound reasons religions are many, but Religion, their essence, is one. The dynamic side of true religion is the life of the spirit, which is not creedal or communal but international and universal in its application; for it consists in practical goodness and love, active sympathy and charity, dynamic moral and spiritual idealism. It will make man more and more like his Creator, who is the fountainhead of all virtue, peace and happiness.

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[1] Swami Vivekananda, *Jnana-Yoga*, lecture: 'The Necessity of Religion'.

Such a religion alone can be a power for good, not only in the collective life of one country, but also in that of the whole world. It should be recognized and striven for as an ideal, though it may be hard to realize. It will so key our temporal life as to be in tune with the spiritual, and make the course of communal and national life smooth and easy. It will furnish the ultimate basis for peace between warring nations, for the attempt to end national conflicts by political manœuvres and makeshifts, or build powers or empires on the shifting sands of politics or opportunism, will surely fail.

The mines of the world with their iron and coal, tin and petroleum, silver and gold are limited, but unlimited are the treasures of spiritual wealth in search of which there cannot be any competition or jealousy. True religion will serve as the foundation for the concord of cultures and civilizations, since the value of these consists in refining the mind and aiding the manifestation of the soul. Nay, when cultures and civilizations draw sustenance from such an inexhaustible source, they become endowed with those life-giving elements which help them stand the shocks of time; they become imbued with a rich and imperishable vitality which makes them eternal like the culture and civilizations of India.

A sense of solidarity springing from the conception of the members of Christendom as children of the one Father, or as a flock of sheep protected by the one Shepherd, is a characteristic of the Christian Church. Islam, too, with its unique sense of brotherhood has always united its followers with tight-knit bonds of love and fraternity. So also with the other religions of the

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world. They all have proclaimed the unity and solidarity of their respective followers. But in *practice* the sense of oneness is limited by the followers of every religion to its own fold and does not extend beyond its confines. Universal love and brotherhood cannot be conceived of, much less realized, until the barriers that separate religion from religion and sect from sect are broken down once and for ever. Hinduism alone has proclaimed the unity of all human beings, nay the unity of all living things, arising from the faith that all are potentially divine and are moving towards the complete unfoldment of their spiritual nature by realization of the 'One without a second'. India alone has preached that every church, every creed, is 'only travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances to the same goal'. No other country has furnished the basis of a universal religion which is all-embracing and all-inclusive. No other land has proclaimed the distinctive doctrine of Ishta Devata (Chosen Ideal)—the right of every soul to choose its own path, to seek God in its own way. It was India that taught in the dawn of civilization: 'Truth is One, though Sages call It variously.' It was India again that taught the same lesson through the divine author of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in the post-Vedic period, through Shankara in post-Buddhist times, and through Kabir and Nanak in medieval days. It was India's voice that spoke once again in the modern age through Sri Ramakrishna when he taught the most magnificent and marvellous message of the Harmony of Religions, the most perfect and comprehensive synthesis ever known to humanity.

NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF TRANSLITERATED WORDS FROM SANSKRIT

a sounds like *o* in *come.*

ā sounds like *a* in *far.*

i sounds like *i* in *kin.*

ī sounds like *ee* in *feel.*

u sounds like *u* in *full.*

ū sounds like *oo* in *cool.*

ṛi may be pronounced as *ri.*

e sounds like *e* in *bed*, only longer; e is always long in Sanskrit.

o sounds like *o* in *note*; o is always long in Sanskrit.

ch sounds like *ch* in *church.*

ṅ (guttural) may be pronounced like *n.*

ñ (palatal) is like French *gn* and may be pronounced like *n.*

ṇ (lingual) may be pronounced like *n.*

ṭ and ḍ are hard like *t* and *d* in English.

t and d are soft as in French *th* and *dh.*

ś (palatal sibilant) may be pronounced almost like *sh.*

sh (lingual sibilant) sounds like *sh* in *shine.*

Such of the remaining consonants as appear in the transliteration sound as in English:

kh, ch, chh, jh, ṭh, ḍh, th, dh, ph, bh, are simple sounds *plus* an aspiration.

ṁ stands for: (anuswāra) and sounds like *ng* in *ring.*

ḥ stands for: (visarga) in Sanskrit.

w and v have been used after consonants and v after vowels.

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A LIST OF WORDS, TRANSLITERATED FROM SANSKRIT AND USED IN THIS BOOK, IS GIVEN BELOW WITH DIACRITICAL MARKS

adhikāra
Āgama
ahaṁkāra
ākāśa
akhaṇḍa
aṁśa
ānandamaya
antaḥkaraṇa
āntarika
āśrama
ātmā
avatāra

bhāva
bhāvamukha
bhāva samādhi
bhoktṛ
Brahmajñāna
brāhmin (for Sanskrit *Brāhmaṇa*)

Darśana
dāsya
devatā
divyabhāva

Gāṇapatya
ghāṭ (for Sanskrit *ghaṭṭa*)
gopī

Ishṭam
Ishṭa-Devatā

jīva
jñāna
jñānakāṇḍa
jñāna vichāra
jñāni

kāla
kalā
kāminī
kāñchana
karmakāṇḍa
kuṇḍalinī

mahābhāva
mahākāraṇa
Mahārāja
mālā

nirākāra
nirguṇa
nirvāṇa

nirvikalpa-samādhi
Nyāyasudhā
Nyāya-Vaiśeshika

Pāñcharātra
Paramahaṁsa
paśubhāva
Pāśupata
prāṇa

rāja
ṛshi
rudrāksha mālā
rūpa

sādhanā
sadhana-mārga
saguṇa
sahasrāra
sākara-rūpa
sakhya
samādhi
Sāṁkhya-Yoga
saṁskāra
saṁyoga
sannyāsa
sannyāsin
Sat-Chit-Ānanda (also written as *Sachchidānanda*)

sattābhāva
śākta
śānta
śārīra-śārīri-sambandha
śraddhā
śrāddha
śuddhi
siddhānta
sthūla-dhyāna
sūkshma-dhyāna
swāmitwa-sambandha
swatantra-sattābhāva

tasmāt
tejo-dhyāna
turīya

Vaishṇava
varṇa
varnāśrama
vāri
vāsanā
vātsalya
Vedānta
vichāra
vīrabhāva
virajā-homa
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